

**School of Design and Art**

**Towards a Situated Non-Objective Art Practice**

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**Declaration**

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

Date: 2 November 2015

## Abstract

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This project is a practice-led investigation into the potential for a situated Non-Objective art practice. Taking the divergent impulses that currently inform my own creative practice as a starting point, the project aims to reconcile the differing aesthetic and ideological principles that define both Non-Objective, and situated practice, to achieve new syntheses.

Within this project I use the term 'Non-Objective' as a means of collating and addressing a set of adjacent local (Australian-based) artistic practices that share what I identify as a common stylistic vocabulary. This stylistic vocabulary is framed by the conventions of modernist painting and Post-Painterly Abstraction, and is aligned with notions of modernist autonomy and formalism. I argue that Non-Objective art practice in Australia is largely characterised by the exhibition and circulation of autonomous artworks within the interior spaces of specialised gallery spaces, and that these tendencies perpetuate a preclusion of locale, where the physical, social, political and historical conditions of the public domain are yet to enter the frame of reference for local Non-Objective art.

This analysis is contrasted with what I present as the discourse of situated art practice. By referring to recent writings on site-specific art, place-based art and situated artworks, I outline situated practice as an approach to producing artwork within the public domain that appropriates the conditions of that domain as part of the physical and conceptual content of the work. Unlike the discourse of local Non-Objective art practice, contextual reference and the conditions of locale are paramount to a situated practice and the production of situated artworks. The influence of these seemingly oppositional impulses upon a creative practice is at the centre of this project—and also gives rise to the project's fundamental paradox: how can Non-Objective art practice engage with or be inclusive of the social, political, physical and historical conditions of the public domain when it is principally defined by the preclusion of such content?

Within this project I use dialectics as a methodology to negotiate the aesthetic and ideological differences between Non-Objective practice and situated practice. As part of my practice-led research, dialectics is used to investigate the possibilities for artworks to be at once situated and Non-Objective. Dialectics also functions throughout the exegesis as an analytical tool, a means to address and examine selected artworks against notions of both Non-Objective art and situated practice.

This project aims to creatively negotiate and reconcile the divergent impulses that have informed my creative practice. Throughout the project I have aimed to create artworks that allude to, borrow from or make reference to both Non-Objective art and situated practice; these artworks are neither hybrids nor composites, but may be better understood as new syntheses. This exegesis aims to elucidate the conceptual, material and personal impulses that have informed the production of my artworks and their possible implications for the broader community of practice.

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## Introduction

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Through this project I aim to synthesise a set of divergent impulses that inform my creative practice—those of Non-Objective art and situated practice. Within contemporary art discourse, Non-Objective art and situated practice are two modes of art practice that adhere to differing aesthetic and ideological principles. Non-Objective art has its origins in European Modernity, and as a term is currently used to collate varying modes of formalist, abstract and non-figurative artistic practices. Within an Australian context, Non-Objective practice is largely based in modernist painting, where the artwork operates autonomously from any contextual considerations. In contrast, situated practice describes an interventionist approach to producing art in the public sphere, where social, political and historical context inform the artistic content. It follows that the situated artwork is embedded both physically and conceptually within its surrounds—whereas the Non-Objective artwork is distinguished by the preclusion of context, and instead refers only to itself. Through exegetical writing and visual art practice, this project uses dialectics as a methodology to negotiate the differences between these conflicting artistic approaches, and to investigate the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice.

How Non-Objective practice can be inclusive of contextual reference and the implications of such inclusions is my ongoing concern. An imagined intermediate space between the formal and the social, the autonomous and the contextual, the Non-Objective and the situated and the influences of these seemingly oppositional impulses upon a creative practice is at the centre of this project. It is also here that the fundamental paradox of the project lies: how can Non-Objective art practice engage with or be inclusive of the social, political, physical and historical conditions of the public domain when it is principally defined by the preclusion of such content? Through creative practice I question how artworks might function dialectically, as both Non-Objective and situated.

This project focuses on Non-Objective practices in recent<sup>1</sup> Australian art, whilst

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1. In this project I predominantly refer to artworks made post-2000.

maintaining a relationship with international art practices, theories and ideas. In 2007, Australian artist Daniel Argyle organised an exhibition titled *Profile: Sydney Non Objective Group* at the art space Austral Avenue in Melbourne. Writing retrospectively, Argyle explains that the exhibited works “engaged confidently with the historically established terms of non-objective art as well as current debates. This said, there is diversity within the group that could be said to contain conflicting ideas” (2007, 2). Elaborating on the idea that within the ‘non-objective’ there are differing positions, Argyle explains,

This is the heterogeneous climate that non-objective art occupies today; challenged both internally and externally, it has come to a point where, for many, the term itself has a question mark hanging over it. But this is healthy debate, and the term’s meaning thereby provides a *context* rather than a *destination*. (2)

Argyle’s summation that the term ‘non-objective’ provides a context rather than a destination encapsulates my understanding of, and approach to contemporary Non-Objective practice in recent Australian art. A succinct definition of Non-Objective art is provided in the catalogue for the 1992 exhibition *The Non-Objective World* at The Southbank Centre, London: “the term ‘non-objective’ describes art which has no representational subject matter and is created from purely pictorial elements” (Drew and Jones 1992, 7). Whilst this description reflects the general understanding of the term Non-Objective art, it is evident from Argyle’s commentary that current usage of the term is less definitive and rigid, and instead functions more as a means of collation. For example, Jackson Pollock’s 1952 work *Blue Poles* is a non-representational painting, but it is generally not considered Non-Objective. The work is gestural, textured and expressive, with the layers of paint creating a sense of depth—characteristics at odds with the reductive, hard-edged and Post-Painterly qualities of contemporary Non-Objective art. Similarly, various forms of Indigenous-Australian painting are non-figurative, but are imbued with cultural signifiers and symbols that often form narratives. Symbolism and narrative are also contrary to the principles of self-referentiality and autonomy that currently shape Non-Objective practice, and as such these works also fall outside of contemporary understandings of the Non-Objective. The term Non-Objective does not work as a category or label to encompass all non-representational artworks;

rather it denotes particular types of non-representational practices and artworks that share specific aesthetic and ideological principles. It is this shared set of principles that I identify as framing this mode of creative practice, and in turn provides currency to the term Non-Objective art.

In various circles the term non-objective (lower case) is used along with other forms of abstraction, such as Concrete art, colour field, and hard-edge amongst other similar variations. Whilst acknowledging the nuances that exist between these modes of practice, each with their own geographical and historical origins, within this project I use the term Non-Objective (upper case) to both collate and locate a sphere of practices that I have identified as sharing a common stylistic vocabulary. It is not my intention to simplify what is a diverse interconnected framework of artistic practices and approaches, or to suggest that Non-Objective practice is a homogenous 'movement'. Instead I aim to recognise common methods and principles inherent to the 'scene' of activity within an Australian context, as a means to identify and act upon gaps in knowledge.

Curated by Christoph Dahlhausen, the 2008 exhibition *Australia Contemporary Non-Objective Art*, brought together the works of seventeen Australian artists for three exhibitions held in Bonn, Würzburg and Osnabrück, Germany. In the exhibition catalogue Zara Stanhope writes that "current Australian non-objective practice can be identified as having shared sensibilities as well as differences" (2008, 32). Dahlhausen echoes this summation in his identification of the exhibiting artists as influenced by a diverse range of sources, including "American Concept and Minimal Art, and European Colour Painting" (2008, 22). Both Dahlhausen and Stanhope distance the exhibition from a comprehensive survey of "Australian Non-Objective Art—if indeed it is legitimate to refer to this as a definite ... artistic trend" (Dahlhausen 2008, 22). Despite what the authors describe as the varied and divergent nature of Non-Objective practice in Australia, the chosen title for the exhibition, *Australia: Contemporary Non-Objective Art*, is evidence that as a term Non-Objective works to collate a certain sphere of artistic output. I align my use of the term Non-Objective with this sentiment, as a means to collate a set of artistic practices that share a set of aesthetic conventions, or what I describe as a stylistic vocabulary.

Whilst a detailed historical account of the European origins of Non-Objective art is beyond the scope of this project, I aim to identify a few key ideas to illuminate the current conditions of Non-Objective practice in Australia. Central to the project is the position that local<sup>2</sup> Non-Objective practice generally adheres to a Greenbergian modernist autonomy, whereby the self-referential nature of the Non-Objective artwork is said to isolate the work from any socially, politically or culturally oriented referent. I posit that the autonomous artworks produced through contemporary local Non-Objective practice derive from the rhetoric of American art critic Clement Greenberg which in the 1960s was highly influential upon the advent of Non-Objective practice in Australia.

In 1967, the exhibition *Two Decades of American Painting* opened at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, as an “unprecedented presentation of modern art in an Australian museum” (Barnes 2010, Mainstream art history and criticism). The exhibition involved the works of ninety-eight American artists, including abstract paintings from Joseph Albers, Ellsworth Kelly, Kenneth Noland and Frank Stella amongst others. The exhibition’s “linking of late modernist abstraction to the museum sector” (Barnes 2010, Mainstream art history and criticism) coincided with what was already a growing interest in abstraction amongst a small number of local artists. What originated as a relatively ‘underground’ art scene would peak in 1968 with the exhibition *The Field*, presenting the works of forty Australian artists at the National Gallery of Victoria, and later that year at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Whilst the exhibited works included both paintings and sculptures, it was the paintings of the so-called ‘New Abstractionists’ that received the majority of the critical attention, and whose attributes continue to pervade local Non-Objective art practice today.

The paintings exhibited in *The Field* closely reflected the ideology and visual attributes of Post-Painterly Abstraction, a mode of painting propagated by Greenberg in the 1960s. In his 1960 seminal essay “Modernist Painting”, Greenberg describes modernist art as “the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to

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2. I use the term ‘local Non-Objective practices’ to refer to Non-Objective practices based in Australia.

criticise the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence" (1992, 308). Greenberg uses painting to demonstrate this concept, explaining that through modernism, the limitations specific to the medium of painting such as "the flat surface, the shape of the support [and] the properties of the pigment" (309), previously disguised by the representational image had now become the subject of painting itself. According to writer Natalie Wilson, "Greenberg asserted that narrative expression in painting should be replaced entirely by the 'pure' formal elements of painting; in particular openness, linear clarity of design, and high keyed, even-valued colour ... signifying the natural progression of the formal history of art" (2009, 4). Indeed, Greenberg's essay traces a formal lineage through art history, underpinned by an assertion that "to achieve autonomy, painting ... has made itself abstract" (Greenberg 1992, 310). The progression of painting through modernism towards 'purity' and flatness would culminate in Post-Painterly Abstraction. The set of aesthetic principles that came to characterise this mode of painting as well as an ideology of autonomy would be highly influential to Australia's New Abstraction, and remains central to local Non-Objective art practice today.

The rejection of figurative representation and the reduction of the painted image to geometric form that would characterise the works of Post-Painterly Abstraction were in fact qualities belonging to an earlier Non-Objective art emerging in Europe in the early twentieth century. Developing from European Modernity, Non-Objective art was driven by social and political impulses—artists in search of a new visual language capable of addressing the modern world. Through the propagation of Post-Painterly Abstraction Greenberg had in effect transposed the reductive visual language of a Non-Objective art that had developed from European Modernity to an American context, diluting the social and political impulses that had originally motivated the movement.

In the catalogue for the 1992 exhibition *The Non-Objective World* held at the Southbank Centre, London, authors Martin Hammer and Christina Lodder describe the development of abstraction in European Modernity through "the analogous context of the political crisis and revolutionary aspects of the 1910s" (1992, 9), and explain that as a visual language, Non-Objective art developed as a reaction to the "Western naturalistic tradition" (11). The authors describe the works of

Russian artist Kazimir Malevich as emphasising the autonomy of painting's pictorial elements, through the geometric simplification of the painted image, asserting "the identity of the painting as a flat surface rather than a window onto a fictive world" (12). Following this, they explain that the artist was not simply "interested in formal effects for their own sake" (12) but instead asserted that the new visual language—which Malevich termed 'Suprematism'—"encapsulated the essential spirit of the contemporary world of speed and machinery" (12). It follows that Malevich's works were not simply formal exercises in reductive painting, but were instead both socially and politically motivated, intended to reflect the emergent qualities of the modern society of which he was a part. In tracing the development of other artist groups such as De Stijl and Russian Constructivism, Hammer and Lodder align the motivations of early Non-Objective art with a "wider social and political revolution" (19).

The beginning of Non-Objective practice in early European Modernity was inherently bound to sociopolitical and cultural impulses, unlike the American Post-Painterly Abstraction that would later follow. While the European tradition of Non-Objective art aspired to social, cultural and political progress, Greenberg's formalist approach to art criticism would work to distance artistic content from sociopolitical context. Originally a means with which to address the developing modern world, the trajectory of Non-Objective art into the twentieth century through the writing of Greenberg would see this mode of practice become increasingly isolated from the social and the political. It was the formalist<sup>3</sup> doctrine of a Greenbergian modernist autonomy that would arrive in Australia in the form of *Two Decades of American Painting*, and would later be propagated by *The Field*.

In discussing the beginnings of Non-Objective practice in Australia, writer Carolyn Barnes explains that the curatorial premise and catalogue essays for both *Two Decades of American Painting* and *The Field* "stressed a modernist teleology" and

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3. Formalism is an approach to both art practice and art criticism that privileges the formal qualities of the artwork (as in its physicality and purely visual aspects) as constituting the work's content. Formalism is a concept central to this project, and is discussed in more detail in Chapter One.

that “the connection to Euro-American art eroded the cultural integrity of Australian abstraction” (2010, *Mainstream art history and criticism*). Modernism had been kept out of Australian institutions and museums for much of the twentieth century (Barnes 2010, *Mainstream art history and criticism*). At a time when Australia was trying to forge its own place within a global discourse, the New Abstraction was perceived as something borrowed from international traditions, and hence inauthentic and inadequate in reflecting a distinctly Australian art.<sup>4</sup> In his essay “Post-Formalism in Recent Australian Art”, Billy Gruner describes the beginnings of abstractionist practices in Australia as operating within a “deeply critical” (2008, 5) hostile environment and explains that these practices developed hermetically in isolation from a broader contemporary art system “virtually unaware of their thriving sub-existence” (5). I argue that today Non-Objective art remains in a state of hermeticism, functioning independently of a broader Australian contemporary art as one ‘node’ within an international community of like-minded Non-Objective artists and institutions. I posit that the critical beginnings of Australia’s New Abstraction may account for the lack of local Non-Objective practices that engage with the conditions of locality and the public domain—that is, the here. It appears that the pervasive tendency is for local Non-Objective artists to look outwards towards a more global formalist conversation, rather than inwards, towards the social, political and historical conditions of their immediate locale.

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4. In “Post-Formalism in Recent Australian Art” Gruner attributes the “Antipodean Manifesto” of 1959 as responsible for a lasting marginalisation of abstract practices in Australia. Written by Bernard Smith to accompany an exhibition at the Victorian Artist’s Society, the “Antipodean Manifesto” would defend the tradition of the figurative image in Australian art against an emerging interest in abstraction. According to Gruner the so-called Antipodeans “considered ‘abstraction’ for its own sake of little if any mystagogic import ... [and the] same may also be said for many local historians, critics, artists, curators, and the like, ever since” (2008, 1). He explains that “any local art after that point that willfully demoted nationalistic identity in favour of a more cosmopolitan or internationalist position by proxy, could and often did find itself placed outside a vastly promoted mainstream sentiment—a controlled system of approvals for images of itself to uphold” (2).



I argue that Non-Objective art in Australia today is largely characterised by the exhibition of autonomous artworks within the interior spaces of specialised gallery spaces. Local Non-Objective artists participate in an international community that provides opportunities to exhibit their work within a network of specialised institutions from around the world. Instead of focusing on the local, Non-Objective artists look to the global, producing artworks that can travel to other institutions in other cities without context altering content. These conditions tend to promote the production and exhibition of autonomous artworks for gallery settings and ultimately result in what I describe as a preclusion of locale,<sup>5</sup> where the contextual specificities of locale lie outside the frame of reference for local Non-Objective practices. In this project I establish that a gap in knowledge endures between local Non-Objective practice and contemporary situated practice, which provides an opportunity for a more locale-oriented Non-Objective practice to emerge. This project is a response to this gap in knowledge, and through practice-led research, investigates the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice.

The discourse of Non-Objective art has previously provided the foundation for my artistic practice. Firmly based in Non-Objective painting, my previous work was characterised by hard-edged, geometric composition, the flat application of paint and a general tendency towards the reductive and the minimal. In terms of content, my work followed a 'what you see is what you see'<sup>6</sup> ideology, in other words I was solely concerned with the work's formalist readings, with what was there, with what could be seen—avoiding any implication to what might be felt, associated with, or extrapolated from the work in relation to the complex world

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5. The term locale is used throughout this exegesis to address the social, political and historical dimensions of place. The term locale is used as distinct from the terms site or location, which are generally used to more simply denote a physical area or geographical position.

6. 'What you see is what you see' was a remark made by artist Frank Stella in 1964 in relation to the subject matter of his paintings. The phrase is said to exemplify the minimalist movement (SFMOMA 2004, *What You See Is What You See*), and has come to operate as a pronouncement for the production of artwork that presents the straightforward reality of the artwork's physical properties as the content of the artwork.

beyond its edges. For me, the non-referential and autonomous nature of Non-Objective art provided a means to evade the complexities of making work based on personal, social or cultural contexts, to instead produce artwork that referred exclusively to its own facture.

Recently, my practice has involved more socio-politically oriented content and contextual reference. Time spent in France in 2011 as part of an exchange program to the École Nationale Supérieure d'Art de Dijon marked a significant shift in my artistic practice. I found myself dissatisfied with the silence of my work, with its refusal or perhaps inability to engage with the social, personal, political and historical themes that lay beyond the confines of the Non-Objective canon. For the first time colour, form and material seemed insufficient tools to sustain my creative practice—they were suddenly not enough. It was in Dijon that I began to remove my Non-Objective paintings from the walls of my studio and take them out into the street; tucked under my arm, I would take the paintings for long walks across the city (Figure i.). I would find public places to install the paintings, leaving them leant up against the door of a supermarket, or sticking them onto the backs of trains and buses to watch them disappear. These interventions would work as early attempts to integrate the Non-Objective with the 'outside world',



Figure i. David Attwood, *Walk* (Dijon), 2011, photographic documentation of an action.

with the public domain and its complex system of social, political and historical conditions. This project has seen me position this shift in my practice as a point of departure, extending the intentions of experiments such as those made in Dijon through the production of a body of artwork.

Throughout this project I draw on the discourse of situated practice as a means to creatively engage with the conditions of the public domain. The term 'situated' has been appropriated from the writings of Claire Doherty, whose work is influential to the project. In various essays and publications from 2004 to present, Doherty uses the term situated to refer to those artistic practices that take a situation or context as the point of departure for the process of making art (2004, 7). In extrapolating from Doherty's writings, I understand situated artworks as those that come into being in the form of interventions, actions or durational events made directly within the public domain, where the physical, historical, social and political conditions specific to this domain are in some way incorporated as part of the artwork's content, meaning or value. It follows that context is central to the discourse of situated practice and the production of situated artworks sees context become part of the conceptual and physical content of the work. Through practice-led research, I have employed the creative methods of situated practice in conjunction with what I describe as the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art to create a body of artwork.

This exegesis is divided into five chapters, each of which address and interrogate particular aspects of my investigation into the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice. In each of the chapters artworks by contemporary artists, both local and international, as well as artworks that I have created as part of this project, are used to support lines of thought and areas of inquiry. In Chapter One I outline the aesthetic and ideological underpinnings of contemporary Non-Objective art practice within an Australian context. Through an analysis of *The Field* exhibition against the rhetoric and aesthetic traits of Post-Painterly Abstraction, I establish the conditions of what I identify as a stylistic vocabulary, a set of aesthetic conventions that frame contemporary local Non-Objective art. I explain that through creative practice, I have drawn on this stylistic vocabulary to create a body of artwork. In this chapter I also examine the relationships of various Non-Objective artworks and practices to notions of site and locale in order to establish what I describe as

a preclusion of locale that pervades the discourse of contemporary Non-Objective practice in Australia. The chapter aims to establish that within Australia, a gap in knowledge endures between Non-Objective practice and contemporary situated practice, where an opportunity exists for a more locale-oriented Non-Objective practice to emerge.

Chapter Two outlines the principles and methods that inform my understanding of situated practice, and how they are used to investigate the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice within this project. The writings of Doherty and Miwon Kwon are used to identify key principles that have shaped my understanding of a situated practice. The practice of artist Francis Alÿs is used as an exemplar of a situated practice, and various artworks are analysed to identify key methods used to produce situated artworks. Ultimately I establish that I understand situated practice to be an approach to creative practice that is cognisant of the social, cultural, political, and historical conditions that constitute locale, and is directed by these conditions in producing artwork that may contest, agitate or illuminate them. I detail how in my creative practice the methods and principles of situated practice are employed in conjunction with the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art to produce artworks in response to various urban locales.

At the end of this chapter, I present dialectics as a methodology for practice-led research. It is explained that within the project, dialectics is used as a means to negotiate the oppositional qualities that define both Non-Objective practice and situated practice and to achieve appropriate syntheses through creative practice. Dialectics is used as an analytical tool to investigate the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice and features throughout the exegesis as a means to assess artworks.

In Chapter Three I present and analyse a body of artwork made in response to the public wall paintings of the Western Australian-based artist group Australian Centre for Concrete Art (AC4CA). The practice of the AC4CA is used as an exemplar of a local Non-Objective practice producing artwork within the public domain. I argue that the wall paintings of the AC4CA adhere to modernist autonomy, where the value of the artwork is said to lie entirely within the work, independent of any local contextual consideration. Using this position as a means to assess the AC4CA's

wall paintings, I present a series of interventionist responses to these public works that attempt to situate the wall paintings in relation to the physical and functional conditions of their surrounds. This body of artwork functions as a case study—a series of initial exploratory attempts to ‘situate’ existing Non-Objective artworks within the public domain.

Predominantly, local Non-Objective art practices produce artworks that function without reference to sociopolitical context or referent, where the formal properties of the artwork alone constitute the artwork’s content. Chapter Four presents a body of artwork made in response to the city of Fremantle in Western Australia, that attempts to directly engage, provoke and agitate the sociopolitical conditions of a chosen locale. Jacques Rancière’s writing on the ‘distribution of the sensible’ is used as a means to assess the body of artwork against notions of the political. The chapter presents a body of artwork that functions dialectically, where artworks are at once situated and Non-Objective, formal and political.

Chapter Five presents a body of artwork made in response to the locale of the Sydney Non Objective (SNO) gallery. The body of artwork is in part based on a critique of SNO and the nature of the gallery’s exhibitions, which I suggest exemplifies the tendency for Non-Objective practices to preclude location, rather than reference, appropriate or include the conditions of locale in the production of artworks. As a reaction to this tendency, and as part of my investigation into the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice, I question how notions of the local and regional folklore might enter the frame of reference for Non-Objective practice. Lucy Lippard’s text *Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (2007) is used to analyse a body of my artwork in relation to notions of locale and regional folklore.

In this final chapter I also introduce dissemination as a method for producing situated Non-Objective artworks. Alÿs’ writings on ‘the fable’ are used to frame understandings of the effect of the disseminated artwork on a public audience and the potential for artwork to take on the form of a story or urban legend that “survives the event itself” (Alÿs 2002, quoted in Godfrey 2010, 15). In investigating the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice and as a counter to the production of autonomous artworks for gallery display, I have used dissemination as a method

to extend Non-Objective outcomes into the public domain. Through the analysis of a body of artwork made in response to the locale of SNO, this chapter presents various attempts to engage, appropriate, incorporate and illuminate the regional folklore of a locale through a Non-Objective framework.

This exegesis works to elucidate the conceptual, material and personal impulses that inform the body of artwork that is central to this practice-led research project. Throughout this project I have aimed to create artworks that allude to, borrow from or make reference to both Non-Objective art and situated practice. These artworks are neither hybrids nor composites, but may be better understood as new syntheses that work to reflect the aesthetic and ideological principles of both Non-Objective art and situated practice. The body of artwork made as part of this project does not function to illustrate the theories and ideas presented in this exegesis, nor should the exegesis function as the primary means to engage the artwork. Instead, the artworks are reflections on the notion of a situated Non-Objective practice, and the exegesis works as a way to locate the artworks within broader spheres of contemporary art and practice-led research.



This chapter outlines the aesthetic and ideological underpinnings of contemporary Non-Objective art practice within an Australian context. Firstly, I aim to establish the conditions of what I identify as a stylistic vocabulary, a set of aesthetic conventions that frame contemporary local Non-Objective art. Through an examination of the exhibition *The Field* (1968) against the Post-Painterly Abstraction that was prevalent in the 1960s, I establish that this stylistic vocabulary is historically bound to notions of modernist autonomy and formalism, which today remain central to local Non-Objective art.

Secondly, I examine the relationships of various Non-Objective artworks and practices to notions of site and locale, drawing on the *Tribute to the Triangle* exhibition at gallery Sydney Non Objective (SNO), Sydney, the *Constructed Colour 4* exhibition at Artspace, Sydney, and the public wall paintings of artist group Australian Centre for Concrete Art (AC4CA), Fremantle, in order to establish a general preclusion of locale that I argue pervades the discourse of local Non-Objective practice. The practice of German artist Leni Hoffmann is used as an exemplar to present an integrative approach to site and locale, evidencing a Non-Objective practice directed and informed by the physical and functional attributes of urban sites. The chapter establishes that within Australia, a gap in knowledge endures between Non-Objective practice and contemporary situated practice, where an opportunity exists for a more locale oriented Non-Objective practice to emerge. This project is a response to this gap in knowledge, and investigates the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice.

### **The Field**

I draw on the seminal 1968 exhibition *The Field* as a cornerstone in identifying the pervading aesthetic and ideological principles that currently shape Non-Objective art practice in Australia. Whilst abstraction had gained momentum through the works of artists returning to Australia from Europe and America in the 1960s, *The Field* would mark a significant moment in Australian art as an unprecedented



presentation of entirely non-figurative, Non-Objective artworks by Australian artists. Presented at the National Gallery of Victoria, *The Field* included the sculptures and paintings of forty Australian artists deemed to be working in the New Abstraction. The exhibited paintings reflected the aesthetic tendencies and conventions of an American Post-Painterly Abstraction, and with these, an ideology based in modernist autonomy and formalism. I identify this period as forging a stylistic vocabulary that remains central to local Non-Objective art practice today, and which has been appropriated in the production of artworks as part of this project. The conditions of this stylistic vocabulary will be outlined through an analysis of *The Field* against Post-Painterly Abstraction.

The gradual move of modernist painting in the mid-1960s towards an ultimate flatness and a purification of medium culminated in what American critic Clement Greenberg termed 'Post-Painterly Abstraction'. In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition titled *Post-Painterly Abstraction*, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, USA, in 1964, Greenberg provides a description of what had become a pivotal term in the positioning of the new Post-Painterly Abstraction against the former Abstract Expressionism, writing "Painterly means, among other things, the blurred, broken, loose definition of colour and contour. The opposite of painterly is clear, unbroken, and sharp definition" (1964, 5). Greenberg uses the painterly works of the Abstract Expressionists to compare and contrast the works of the 'Post-Painterly', emphasising a general openness and clarity. "By contrast with the interweaving of light and dark graduations in the typical Abstract Expressionist picture, all the artists in this show move towards a physical openness of design ... towards *linear clarity*" (7).

In addition to the described clarity of design, Greenberg also identifies other common traits amongst the exhibited paintings, one of which is the "high keying, as well as lucidity, of their colour" (1964, 8). He describes a tendency for the included artists to "stress contrasts of pure hue rather than contrasts of light and dark. For the sake of these ... [and] in the interests of optical clarity, they shun thick paint and tactile effects" (8). In summary, Greenberg describes late modernist painting's move towards an emphasis on flatness as being achieved through a clarity of design, a lucidity of colour (where pure, unmodulated hue is favoured over graduations of light and dark), and an evasion of the painterly—

that is, the tactile and the textured. In evading the painterly, the hard-edged works of Post-Painterly Abstraction circumvented the emotive expression of the gestural and the textural that was so central to Abstract Expressionism, instead functioning as paintings *about* painting—paintings that referred solely to their own formal properties. The described visual traits that had come to define Post-Painterly Abstraction would soon find their way into the practices of Australian abstractionists, and would provide an aesthetic and ideological foundation for *The Field* (Wilson 2009, 4).

Writing in the exhibition catalogue for *The Field*, Australian critic Elwyn Lynn describes a pervading tendency for the exhibited paintings to reflect a certain compositional equilibrium resulting in an evasion of 'spatial effect'. According to Lynn, "any part of a Michael Johnson or a Paul Partos inclines to *equal pressure*", and "in Tony Bishop's *Click, Clack, Click* the rising and falling actions are indistinguishable" (1968, 84). Here Lynn is describing the way that compositional elements of various paintings neither optically extrude from the canvas outwards, nor do they recede beyond the surface. Rather they are "united on the same plane", without "suggestion of spatial effect" (84). As for the works that *do* seem to reflect an optical ambiguity or illusion to spatial depth, Lynn describes these works as ironically illusionary, in that "what looks like an illusion of depth is always corrected by a simultaneous assertion of the surface" (85).

After discussing individual paintings exhibited as part of *The Field*, Lynn turns his attention to the exhibition as a whole, pitting the formal works of *The Field* against other earlier modes of abstraction:

'*The Field*' is a reaction in fact, against the informal, the 'disorganised' ... facile mannerisms and broken incomplete forms ... While this splendid efflorescence of talent may be an enthusiastically cool, an eagerly detached look at the way art works, it produces an opaque art that needs no veil to be torn to reveal its metaphysics, symbolism and allegories; it needs no decoding. (1968, 85)

Ultimately Lynn equates the exhibited painting's rejection of illusionary depth with a certain matter-of-factness,<sup>7</sup> an assertion of surface that announces that the New Abstract paintings are things in the world—and not things *unto* a world. The assessment of painting against the criterion of flatness as well as the rejection of illusion through an assertion of the painting's literal, flat surface would align the works of *The Field* with a Greenbergian modernist ideology.

Patrick McCaughey makes a similar summation to Lynn in his essay "Experience and the New Abstraction", also featured in the exhibition catalogue for *The Field*. For McCaughey, the prevailing characteristic of the New Abstraction is an "extreme directness of address" that is achieved through an intensity of colour and a drastic simplification of form so as to not "distract or dissipate the observer's experience" (1968, 88). Where Lynn describes an evasion of illusionary depth as resulting in an opaqueness, McCaughey discusses the exhibited shaped canvases<sup>8</sup> in a similar vein. He argues that the shaped canvas

asserts the objectness of the work of art ... The work of art is literally an object existing in the world of objects ... There is no "world of painting" in the shaped canvas. It exists in the real world as itself. We don't look in at a depicted event: it highlights itself as an event on the wall. (89)

Both McCaughey and Lynn stress the objectness of the paintings exhibited in *The Field*, and the various ways that the traditional function of the painting as a pictorial window is superseded by an assertion of surface and objecthood. This general assertion of surface described by Lynn and McCaughey as evident amongst the paintings of *The Field*, would function as a means to reject the illusionary qualities

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7. The straightforward, factual and objective is what is meant by the term 'matter-of-factness'.

8. A shaped canvas is a painting made on a non-rectangular support. As a method for painting, the shaped canvas came to prominence in the 1960s through the works of Stella and Kelly amongst others, who used it to assert painting's objectness, its physicality in the world. The shaped canvas remains a persistent convention within the practices of many local Non-Objective artists.

of representational painting, positioning the works of the New Abstraction in accordance with the modernist ideology of Greenberg.

Upon reflection, the effect of Greenberg's rhetoric—of flatness, of the non-referential and of the rejection of illusion—on both the production of the artworks presented in the exhibition *The Field* and the surrounding commentary, becomes quite transparent.<sup>9</sup> So influenced were Lynn and McCaughey by Greenberg that one can almost sense the American art critic looking over their shoulders as they typed their essays; Lynn repeatedly emphasises an equal treatment of compositional elements that ultimately results in an assertion of surface, whilst McCaughey discusses the use of intense colour across the exhibition, as well as a general 'directness' achieved by the paintings that likens to Greenberg's use of the terms 'openness' and 'clarity.' It is clear that the visual attributes of the works exhibited in *The Field* share a close affinity with the traits and tropes of Greenberg's Post-Painterly Abstraction: compositions are hard-edged, shapes are enclosed and not broken or incomplete, colour is used uniformly and with 'lucidity' fields of contrasting hues butt-up against each other and there is a general evasion of the textured, the tactile and the expressive.<sup>10</sup> Whilst his works were not discussed by either Lynn or McCaughey, I view the paintings of Ron Robertson-Swann exhibited in *The Field* as exemplifying the Post-Painterly nature of the New Abstraction (Figure 1.1). I identify the described set of aesthetic tendencies, traits and qualities that characterised the New Abstraction as comprising a stylistic vocabulary that continues to provide a foundation for contemporary local Non-Objective practice.

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9. Greenberg visited Australia in May of 1968 to present the inaugural John Power Lecture in Contemporary Art, at the Power Institute, University of Sydney (Barker and Green, 2013, 5). In the catalogue for *The Field* McCaughey also actually prefaces his essay with a quotation from Greenberg: "Art is a matter strictly of experience" (Greenberg 1958, quoted in McCaughey 1968, 88).

10. I use the term expressive here, because in Greenberg's essay for the catalogue *Post-Painterly Abstraction* (1964), and in both Lynn and McCaughey's essays in the catalogue for *The Field* (1968), Abstract Expressionism is used by the authors as a movement to pit the new work against—referring to the Post-Painterly for Greenberg, and the New Abstraction in the case of Lynn and McCaughey.

Figure 1.1 Ron Robertson-Swann, *Orange Oriel*, 1965, acrylic on canvas,  
248 x 130 cm.

It was not only a visual likeness that the Australian New Abstraction shared with Greenberg's Post-Painterly Abstraction. Functioning reciprocally with Greenberg's assessment of the modernist artwork against the limitations of its medium, was formalism. Formalism describes an approach to either the production or the interpretation of an artwork that "emphasizes the autonomy or primacy" of the "formal qualities" of the artwork, its physicality and purely visual aspects, independently of context (Williams 2009, Formalism). Whilst the concept of formalism has been traced back as early as Plato, the term has become largely synonymous with the writing of Greenberg, specifically in relation to abstract painting. Indeed an artwork freed from all external and associative reference, as Greenberg proposed, lends itself to being assessed solely by its formal qualities.

The reciprocal relationship between the aesthetic principles of Post-Painterly Abstraction and formalism are reflected in McCaughey's commentary about *The Field*. McCaughey discusses what he perceives as a general reluctance, on the part of the viewer, to engage with the actualities of an abstract painting's composition without any associative agenda or coding—where for instance "blue equals sky or water and so on" (1968, 89). McCaughey explains that the "severely non-referential quality of the new abstraction" is particularly "puzzling" (88), given that within an Australian context abstraction has always maintained a relationship with the physical world. He writes,

In John Olsen's abstractions references to landscape provide the basic rhythms; in Brett Whiteley the figure provides the starting point for a free improvisatory mode of abstraction. But neither landscape nor the figure are starting points for the bulk of the present exhibitors. Instead of being able to approach the abstract experience of a work through the intermediary of an association external to the painting, we are confronted directly with the experience ... The work of art becomes the autonomous object, independent of any experience external to itself. (89)

Ultimately by making itself unequivocally non-referential, the work of art is said to achieve autonomy—it can be about nothing other than itself. From McCaughey's discussion it is evident that in conjunction with being closely aligned with the

visual attributes of Post-Painterly Abstraction, the works presented in *The Field* were also principally aligned with the concepts of formalism and autonomy.

Nearly half a century on from *The Field* exhibition, I identify the reciprocal concepts of non-referential abstraction, painting as object and the autonomy of the artwork as remaining central principles of contemporary Non-Objective art in Australia. The described 'stylistic vocabulary' that emerged from *The Field* and continues to frame contemporary local Non-Objective art, can be considered to be a continuation of Post-Painterly Abstraction; compositions are hard-edged, a flat and even application of paint is favoured over the textured or painterly, shapes are enclosed forms rather than open gestures, colour is uniform and so on. These aesthetic principles are historically bound to notions of modernist autonomy and formalism, where the content of the artwork is exclusively limited to the nature of its formal properties, and I argue that local Non-Objective practice has continued this trajectory in producing autonomous artworks for gallery display.

Through my practice-led research, the stylistic vocabulary of local Non-Objective art has been appropriated to produce artworks in response to specific urban locales, beyond the confines of the art gallery. In the following sections, I argue that local Non-Objective practices generally evidence a preclusion of locale—that the conditions of locale are yet to enter the field of reference for the production and exhibition of Non-Objective artwork.

### **Sydney Non Objective**

Located in the suburb of Marrickville in Sydney's inner-west, is Sydney Non Objective (SNO), a small artist-run gallery housed above a hardware store. The gallery was established in 2005 by artists Billy Gruner and Andrew Leslie, with the premise of promoting "non-objective, concrete and abstract art" (Barnes 2010, n.p.) and since its inauguration has developed into the "dedicated venue" (Barnes 2010, Abstraction, it never left) for Non-Objective practice in Australia. Within the context of this project, SNO occupies a nucleus-like position, in evidencing the prevailing conventions, methods and principles of local Non-Objective art through an ongoing survey-style exhibition program.

The type of work shown at SNO fits within a specific aesthetic scheme. In a catalogue dedicated to the gallery's fifth anniversary titled *Sydney Non Objective 2005–2010*, writer Carolyn Barnes introduces SNO as “an artist-initiated gallery with a deep and specific investment in aesthetic frameworks” (2010, n.p.). Barnes elaborates further on this point, collating the works shown at SNO as “a distinct set of art practices: non-objective, concrete and new abstractionist” (2010, n.p.). On numerous occasions Barnes makes a point of explaining that the work shown at SNO evidences the different and varied approaches of adjacent abstract modes, in contrast to the dominant view of abstraction as a “unitary field of art practice” (2010, *Managing a line*). She does however locate these differing practices within a field of discourse, defined by what they are *not*. Barnes explains that SNO generally avoids the presentation of “realist abstraction” (2010, *Managing a line*). By realist abstraction, Barnes is presumably describing those modes of abstraction that maintain a relationship to the ‘real’ in terms of pictorial content, that is, the depiction of recognisable forms and figures. This distinction isolates the ‘purely’<sup>11</sup> non-objective, non-referential and autonomous work shown at SNO from the larger more general ambit of abstraction.

The heterogenous nature of the exhibitions held at SNO make it difficult to collate the range of works shown with a term or description that is applicable to all. Nevertheless, there is an underlying, pervasive aesthetic framework that runs through SNO, a stylistic vocabulary to which the large majority of works adhere to. This vocabulary is grounded in Post-Painterly Abstraction, with the addition of various media having slightly expanded the ‘syntax’ of local Non-Objective art over time. In comparing the New Abstractionist works presented in *The Field* with a recent exhibition held at SNO, the latter may involve photography, sound, installation, video and the readymade—as well as painting. Despite a more expansive use of media, what remains consistent is an underlying “directness of production” (Barnes 2010, *Managing a line*), an assertion of objecthood (‘the artwork is a thing in the world, not unto a world’) and indeed a general matter-of-factness imbued by the hard-edge, the pure hues, the clarity of design and an

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11. On numerous occasions throughout her essay in the *Sydney Non Objective 2005–2010* catalogue, Barnes (2010) uses the terms ‘purity’, ‘purist’ and ‘pure abstraction’ presumably as a point of contrast to expressive or realist abstraction.



evasion of the painterly and the gestural. Since *The Field*, Non-Objective practice in Australia has expanded to include a range of media, whilst maintaining a strong aesthetic and ideological relationship to modernist painting.

In the foundation years of SNO's development, a proliferation of global connectivity ensued between it and other Non-Objective oriented institutions from around the world.<sup>12</sup> An international nexus has since emerged, regularly producing group exhibitions involving artists affiliated with these institutions. The role of SNO within this system is championed by Barnes, who proposes that the gallery's involvement "underscores how varied and multi-located frameworks create meaning and value in contemporary abstraction, which is best understood as a set of situated practices" (2010, *Abstraction, it never left*). I disagree with Barnes on two counts, firstly with the proposition that contemporary abstraction is given value and meaning through 'multi-located frameworks', and secondly with the description of these frameworks as a 'set of situated practices'. Whilst the group exhibitions held at SNO bring together the works of artists from various "places and times" (*Abstraction, it never left*), this has little bearing on the content, meaning or value of the works themselves, which predominantly evidence a preclusion of location and locale, rather than a direct and specific engagement with it. The majority of works exhibited at SNO function as autonomous objects that can be easily transported from place to place without location altering content. Contrary to what Barnes describes as a set of 'situated practices', the production of autonomous artworks for circulation amongst various art galleries works in opposition to what I understand 'situated practice' to be: an in-situ approach to the creation of artwork where content is directed by context.<sup>13</sup> In this project I draw on the discourse of situated practice to investigate the potential for Non-Objective practice to directly engage specific locales, and key principles of a situated practice will be analysed in detail in the following chapters.

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12. These include, amongst others, ParisConcret, Paris; Minus Space, New York; Centre for Concrete Art, Brussels; Hebel\_121, Basel; H29, Brussels; PS, Amsterdam; and Raum 2810, Bonn (Barnes 2010, *Abstraction, it never left*).

13. The notion of a situated practice is pivotal to the premise of this research project, and is examined in detail in Chapter Two.

Evidencing what I describe as a preclusion of locale is the exhibition *Tribute to the Triangle*, hosted by SNO between December 2011 to January 2012, featuring the works of thirty-six artists affiliated with SNO and the gallery ParisConcret.<sup>14</sup> The exhibited works were mostly modest in scale, painting-based and hung on the wall. None of the works made any discernable reference to 'location', either to the geographical location of the gallery space (Marrickville, Sydney, Australia) nor of their origin. It was as if the gallery space operated as a neutral, isolatable situation for the presentation of autonomous artworks from disparate origins. In fact without the aid of a floorsheet or alike, it would be difficult to ascertain that the works were in fact, in the words of Barnes, from "multi-located frameworks" (2010, *Abstraction, it never left*). However Barnes' use of the term is perhaps less about attributing multi-located frameworks as a source of 'meaning and value' to be found within the content of the exhibited works themselves, but is rather suggesting that the bringing together of artists and artworks from around the globe gives meaning and value to the discourse, as if a kind of kudos is achieved through participating in a network of far-reaching international relations. Indeed, how can a Non-Objective artwork reference location when it is a mode of practice fundamentally based on an eradication of reference to anything outside of itself?

Despite the paradoxical nature of such a question, the exhibition *Constructed Colour 4* evidenced a more location-oriented premise. Curated by artist Kyle Jenkins in 2004 for Artspace, Sydney, *Constructed Colour 4*<sup>15</sup> brought together a number of artists working within a Non-Objective framework to demonstrate "an expansion of the painted field that captures a more installation-based, site-specific, architectonic field of inquiry" (Jenkins 2006, 4). The exhibited artworks were intended to directly respond to the gallery space, described by Jenkins as being "produced in the space, for the space and in relation to the space" (5). Jenkins further positions the artworks as developing upon the innovations of 1960s and 1970s Minimalism, that saw "the discourse of the work of art ...

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14. ParisConcret is a small artist-run gallery in Paris, France, that like SNO, has an exhibition program that exclusively presents "reductive abstract work" (van der Aa 2014, 4).

15. *Constructed Colour 4* was the last in a series of four exhibitions held between 2001 and 2004 at various institutions in New South Wales and Victoria.

[expand] beyond its own physical presence, making the architecture, the site, and viewer participation all determining elements in defining and experiencing the work" (13). In contrast to the previously discussed *Tribute to the Triangle* exhibition at SNO, *Constructed Colour 4* saw artists utilise the exhibition space as a site in which to respond through the production of artwork, evidencing a shift towards a more site-responsive Non-Objective practice.

One of the included works, artist Simon Morris' *Sit in Space* was an irregularly shaped plane painted in a high gloss blue and presented horizontally (Figure 1.2). The plane was held in the air by round legs, resembling a short table. This blue monochrome plane was in fact a "scaled down version of the floorplan" (Jenkins 2006, 6) of the Artspace gallery, Sydney. The work is an example of how the methods of Non-Objective practice have been appropriated to suit a site-specific agenda. Stylistically, *Sit in Space* fulfills the criteria of a Non-Objective work: there is a clarity of design, a uniform use of colour, the form is geometric and hard edged. In essence the work could be interpreted as a shaped canvas in the form a floor plan, presented horizontally. At the same time, the work's orientation and scale referenced the architectural space that it was exhibited in, the Artspace gallery, eliciting a cohesion between the artwork and the space.

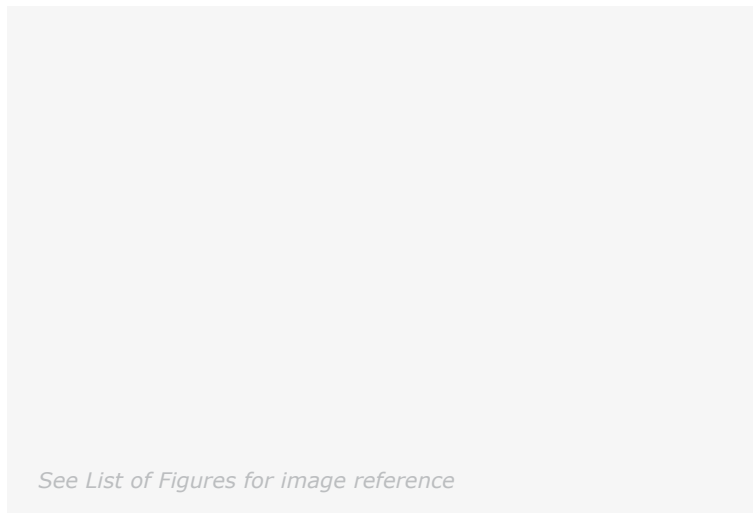


Figure 1.2 Simon Morris, *Sit in Space*, 2004.

For the artworks exhibited as part of *Constructed Colour 4*, the relationship between the artwork and its site was largely driven by a response to the physical, material and architectural specificities of the Artspace gallery. None of the artworks (mostly painting based with some sculptural, video and installation based works) attempted to engage, reference or acknowledge the *wider* locale of the gallery, that is, the historical and sociopolitical facets of the Gunnery Building that hosts Artspace, as well as the surrounding suburb of Woolloomooloo. The Gunnery Building was formerly a Navy warehouse and training facility, and became host to the Artspace gallery in 1992 (Arts NSW 2015, The Gunnery). The suburb of Woolloomooloo in which the Gunnery Building is located is historically a former docklands area and working class district of Sydney. Whilst the exhibition premise of *Constructed Colour 4* claimed a certain site-specificity, the artworks remained tied to the interior space(s) of the art gallery, focusing on the physical attributes of site rather than the social, the political and the historical conditions of the environment beyond the gallery walls.

In response to the *Constructed Colour 4* exhibition and to the discourse of local Non-Objective art more generally, I argue that even works that claim a certain site-specificity remain detached or disengaged with the locale of the gallery space—the street, suburb or city that it is located, as well as the historical, social and political space that it occupies. The interior space of the gallery is treated as if it were somehow closed off or divisible from these factors and the notion of ‘site’ remains an exclusively gallery-space-based concept. In building on the innovations of the *Constructed Colour 4* exhibition and the attempts made to align the production of artwork with the physical conditions of site, this project sees the site for Non-Objective practice expand beyond the art gallery and into the urban environment, as a means to investigate the potential for Non-Objective practice to engage the physical, social, political and historical conditions of the public domain.

### **Australian Centre for Concrete Art**

Within Australia, the production of Non-Objective artwork for the public domain is not entirely unprecedented; an exemplar of a Non-Objective art practice operating

outside of the art gallery is the work of the artist group Australian Centre for Concrete Art (AC4CA).<sup>16</sup> The Western Australian-based group takes their name from the Concrete art movement that began in Europe in the 1930s. The term 'concrete' was devised as an alternative to the more widely used 'abstraction', by Dutch artist Theo van Doesburg who described Concrete artwork as being

constructed of purely plastic elements (lines, planes, surfaces and colours); devoid of references to nature, lyricism, symbolism and the unconscious, and with no signification beyond itself.<sup>17</sup>

(1930, quoted in Hillings 2004, 50)

The aesthetic and ideological framework that Concrete art adheres to is similar to that of the previously discussed Post-Painterly Abstraction; there is an evasion of painterly expression and the gestural, and a concern for the geometric, the reductive and an assertion of the autonomy of the artwork. Because of these common traits, I identify the practice of the AC4CA as contributing to and occupying an important role within the larger ambit of local Non-Objective art. I propose that the practice of the AC4CA complies to an ideology of modernist autonomy, where the group intend for their artworks to be read in isolation from the social, political and historical particularities of their locale. I analyse the practice of the AC4CA

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16. Some of the ideas featured in the remaining written sections of Chapter One were originally presented at the 2012 ACUADS Conference held 3–5 October 2012, at Central Institute of Technology, Perth, in the paper "Urban Intervention within Non-Objective Art Practice".

17. Over time van Doesburg's definition undertook many variations through the publications and exhibitions orchestrated by artist Max Bill, who propagated Concrete art across Europe and South America following van Doesburg's death. In 1959, Bill's terminologies came under scrutiny via Neoconcretism, a movement that rejected "concrete art's emphasis on the purely visual" (Hillings 2004, 57). Through Neoconcretism, artists such as Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica employed an "expressive geometric visual vocabulary" in conjunction with "viewer participation", where the artwork was experienced through its physical enagement and manipulation (Hillings 2004, 57). Despite these developments, Concrete art in Australia remains largely tied to self-referential geometric painting, as evidenced by the AC4CA.

in order to establish that a gap in knowledge exists between local Non-Objective practices and other site-oriented artistic practices, providing an opportunity for a situated Non-Objective practice to emerge.

Forming in 2001, the AC4CA has produced a number of large wall paintings throughout the urban environment of the city of Fremantle.<sup>18</sup> True to the ethos of Concrete art, these wall works are strictly self-referential. Director of the AC4CA Julian Goddard defines the intention of the group as to produce “an aesthetic intervention in the public domain. By appropriating large city walls this intervention can be emphatic and powerful—but none of these walls carry any symbolic or representational messages” (2011, n.p.). Goddard reiterates that although these works exist within the public environment, “this is an art that denies any direct political, social or moral position other than to present an aesthetic experience mediated by art in places where that might not be expected” (n.p.). I deduce from Goddard’s statements that the AC4CA intend for the content of their wall paintings to function autonomously from their urban surrounds.

Given the group’s denial of any content, message or meaning associated with the ‘publicness’ of their wall paintings, the AC4CA’s rationale for this mode of abstraction’s “move into the public domain” (Goddard 2011, n.p.) appears largely practical, in that large walls provide a scale for their paintings “unavailable in galleries” (n.p.). In a catalogue collating the works of the group made between 2002 and 2004, Goddard (2004a, n.p.) explains that “each of the ... AC4CA projects saw the artist make a massively enlarged version of their usual imagery. There has been no affectation to any notion of a different audience for these ‘public works’.” In effect, the public domain is used by the AC4CA as a way to achieve large scale Non-Objective paintings that in the words of Goddard, provide a “visual effect that couldn’t be achieved in any other manner” (2011, n.p.). I propose that for the AC4CA, these paintings are simply an extension of the affiliated artists’ studio or gallery practices and the works are of little relation to the urban environment in which they are realised.

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18. Since 2008 the AC4CA have created works in the Perth suburbs of East Perth, Osborne Park and Subiaco. However, most of the group’s public wall paintings are in Fremantle and it is this group of paintings specifically that is being addressed by the research.

In recent years, the AC4CA have held several exhibitions that I suggest further demonstrate that the public domain is of minor significance to the content of their artworks. In September 2012, AC4CA held an exhibition at gallery FABRIKculture in Hégenheim, France. The gallery is a large warehouse-like space, and the exhibition consisted of a number of large wall paintings executed side-by-side on the interior walls of the gallery. Also in 2012, the group exhibited a series of prints at the gallery ParisConcret in Paris, France. The prints existed as reductive versions of the group's past wall paintings. These exhibitions are evidence that the public domain is not vital to the practice of the AC4CA; the interior space of a large gallery is just as viable, and the compositions of large wall paintings can be reduced in scale for gallery display.

In 2014 the AC4CA held another large-scale gallery-based exhibition at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA) in Perth. Titled *AC4CA: One Place After Another*, the exhibition featured a series of large-scale wall paintings made within the interior spaces of the PICA gallery. Curated by Leigh Robb, the exhibition was aligned with a site-specific curatorial premise that saw the participating artists "optically and intuitively drawing out the defining properties of a wall, keenly aware of its proportions, its adjacent surfaces, and the movement of light" (2014, 90). I argue that despite claiming the works to be site-specific, the engagement of the AC4CA's wall paintings with site was limited to the architectural specificities of the gallery space, and seemed to preclude the site's other conditions—such as the gallery's historical, social and political conditions as well as those specific to the gallery's surrounding environment. This assessment is based on an expansive understanding of 'site' as a set of discursive factors that includes the social, political and historical conditions specific to a locale, rather than simply a physical area or location. How these conditions specific to a site might be engaged through a Non-Objective framework is what is investigated through this research project and will be further analysed in the following sections.

Whilst the AC4CA have expanded local Non-Objective practice out of the gallery space and into the urban environment, the outcomes essentially remain scaled-up versions of the Non-Objective paintings usually displayed in the gallery. Given the writings of Goddard and the ethos of Concrete art, it is evident that the Fremantle wall paintings of the AC4CA *do not intend* to resonate, assimilate, contest or

otherwise engage with their locale—and so it would be ineffective to assess or critique them in these terms. Nevertheless, in reviewing the wall paintings of the AC4CA and their relationship to locale, a gap in knowledge emerges between local Non-Objective practices and contemporary site-oriented art practices, for which site is pivotal to artistic content.

*AC4CA Project 13* is a wall painting designed by artist and member of the AC4CA John Nixon, located on Leake Street in Fremantle (Figure 1.3). Nixon's design has been executed on the back wall of a private car park and is approximately nine metres high by thirteen metres wide. The design divides the wall into eight even segments with the use of alternating white and silver stripes. Whilst it could be argued that the design has been made in response to the wall's dimensions, it ignores other physical attributes of the wall, such as the row of small ventilation grates two thirds of the way up, and a placard fixed to its surface reading 'PRIVATE PROPERTY Authorised Vehicles Only'. The car park is secured by a cable gate and hosts the vehicles of nearby companies, such as Craig Mostyn Group and Razor Business Solutions. In its formal composition the wall painting *AC4CA Project 13*

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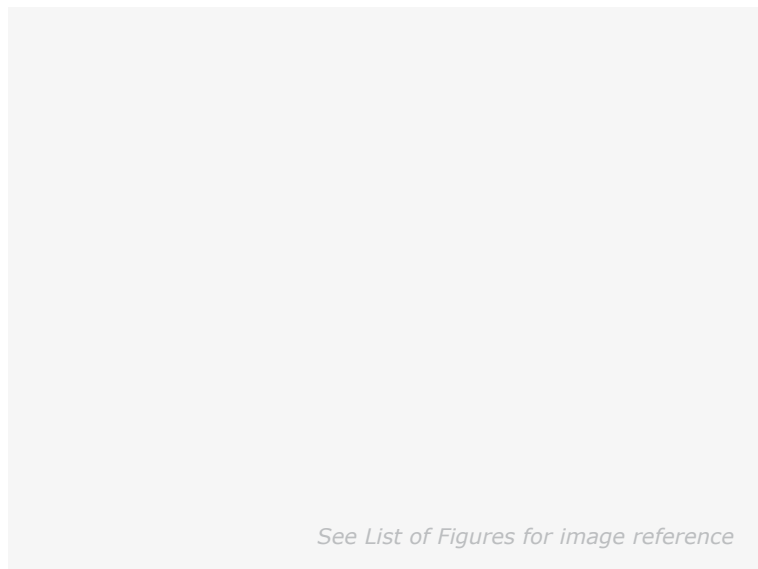


Figure 1.3 John Nixon, *AC4CA Project 13*, 2009, acrylic paint on wall, 920 cm x 1280 cm.



makes no discernable reference to its surroundings, either to the qualities of the wall itself (besides its dimensions), or to the private car park in which it is located.

A short walk from Nixon's wall painting is another AC4CA wall painting also located on a large wall of a private car park. Designed by artist Jan van der Ploeg, *AC4CA Project 15* is located on Henry Street in Fremantle, and is approximately ten metres high by eleven metres long. The painting's composition consists of a grid of black and white squares. Adjacent to the car park is the Fremantle's Workers Social and Leisure Club and administrative buildings of the University of Notre Dame. Like the previously discussed *AC4CA Project 13*, the Henry Street wall painting makes no reference to these institutions or to the social and functional attributes of the private car park in which it exists. The AC4CA wall paintings are instead strictly self-referential and in their autonomy work to preclude an engagement with the historical, sociopolitical conditions of their surrounds. In effect *AC4CA Project 13* and *AC4CA Project 15* could hypothetically be swapped and re-executed in the other's location, without significantly altering the content of the works. Whilst I acknowledge that it is not the intention of the AC4CA for their artworks to engage the conditions of their locale, analysing these wall paintings in terms of their relationship to their surroundings further conveys the aforementioned 'gap' in knowledge; how *might* the AC4CA have responded to these locales, and what might such responses look like?

Within the context of this research project, the AC4CA occupies an exemplary position representing a practice that employs the methods and principles of Non-Objective practice to produce artworks for public settings.<sup>19</sup> In this project I build from the steps that local Non-Objective practice has taken into the public realm, through a more integrative approach to locale. Whilst it could be argued that the AC4CA's wall paintings transform their site in a visual sense, and provide a "point of difference" (Dufour 2005, n.p.), they essentially remain "purely visual statements" (n.p.) and hardly engage or acknowledge the physical, historical and

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19. Whilst there are other examples of local artists creating works for public contexts within a Non-Objective framework, such as Trevor Richards and Robert Owen, I identify the practice of the AC4CA as constituting the vast majority of work made in this area within Australia.

sociopolitical conditions of their locale in the formation of the work. Whilst it is undoubtedly the intention of the AC4CA for the content of their works to remain within the realm of the purely visual, I have identified an opportunity to integrate locale as part of the frame of reference for Non-Objective practice, where the creation of Non-Objective artworks within the public domain might engage the social, political and historical conditions of that domain.

### **Leni Hoffmann**

Within an Australian context, the vast majority of Non-Objective artworks made in the public domain remain tied to notions of autonomy and formalism, and the potential for more socially, historically and politically oriented outcomes warrants further exploration. I identify the practice of German artist Leni Hoffmann as evidencing an integrative approach to site, where the urban, public environment is creatively engaged through a Non-Objective framework. Using brightly-coloured plasticine Hoffmann creates temporal interventions in the urban environment that visually reflect the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective practice; often her interventions consist of pure hues and primary shapes that reflect the hard-edged, geometric compositions of Non-Objective art. Whilst her interventions share aesthetic commonalities with the wall paintings of the AC4CA, Hoffmann's interventions are more closely and sensitively oriented towards their urban environment. Konrad Bitterli explains that Hoffmann's public artworks are "based upon a thorough analysis of the situation found there, the specific architectonic characteristics, the possible social functions and everyday points of reference" (2004, 260). In an interview with Lorenzo Fusi, Hoffmann explains that her work "does not try to change a given site into something else. Rather, it catalyses its special features, which may have gone unnoticed up to that point" (Hoffmann quoted in Fusi 2004, 249). Contrary to the AC4CA whose works I suggest claim a certain autonomy from their surrounds through a denial of any "political, social or moral position" (Goddard 2011, n.p.), Hoffmann's interventions assimilate with their locale as site-specific paintings, actions or installations, incorporating the social and functional facets of site as components of the work. Her practice identifies the necessity to take cognisance of site in the formation of artwork, in a manner that the AC4CA do not subscribe to, despite the fact that both practices operate within the public domain.

In a 1997 work titled *Valis* made for Greve in Denmark, Hoffmann removed an area of asphalt from the median strip of a main highway, and replaced it with a geometric composition of pure orange, yellow and green plasticine (Figure 1.4). The dimensions of this plasticine intervention were derived from the existing grass median strip, in order to closely assimilate with the site. The intervention was frequently activated by the turning circle of local public buses, whereby the bus tyres would leave their imprint on the mutable plasticine surface. In discussing *Valis*, Hoffmann writes,

The specific city set-up of Greve allows *Valis* to be viewed from all sides. Almost like a classical sculpture. Different from such, *Valis* mingles with its surroundings, it can never been seen on its own. In fact, *Valis* consists not only of the plasticine intervention, but appropriates the tarmac surrounding it, the geometrically formed grass islands, the street demarcations—which it turns into graphical elements. (1997, 18)

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See List of Figures for image reference

Figure 1.4 Leni Hoffmann, *Valis*, 1997, plasticine intervention.

*Valis* exists reciprocally with its surrounds, both visually in the appropriation of surrounding features (the grass and the tarmac for example) as compositional elements, and physically through the recording of tyre marks across its surface from passing traffic.

Hoffmann further discusses the specificity of *Valis* in relation to its location and the road in which it was installed,

The road daily takes many people past the Kulturhus and Greve to their various destinations. When driving the destination is not important and the sights they fly past are not ... Through *Valis* the endless flow of tarmac is put in relation with its surroundings. The viewer/driver now relates the street to himself and to the road's actual vicinity. A new thought space comes into existence, where there was formerly only a moment of passage. (1997, 18)

Here Hoffmann explains that *Valis* is both inclusive of and specific to the road, incorporating the road's social and functional facets as integral to the content of the artwork. The integration of the intervention with its surrounds marks a significant ideological difference between Hoffmann's practice and the practice of the AC4CA, whose works predominantly function independently of, or without concern for the social and functional facets of their locations.<sup>20</sup>

Hoffmann's 2004 artwork *Iluka* works in contrast to the paintings of the AC4CA and embodies a number of qualities that pervade Hoffman's wider oeuvre. Described by Hoffmann as a "painting experiment ... a site-and action-specific

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20. Contrary to the majority of the AC4CA's Fremantle wall paintings, *AC4CA Project 5* is an example of a work that incorporates the functional attributes of its locale. Designed by Helen Smith, the painting was located "perpendicular to the Perth/Fremantle railway line" (Goddard 2003, AC4CA About) and consisted of a grid of light green ovals that when seen through the windows of the passing train would "compress into circular dots" (Goddard 2003, AC4CA About). This work is an example of an integrative approach to site, where the functional aspects of the work's viewing conditions directed the work's composition. I identify *AC4CA Project 5* as an anomaly within the practice of the AC4CA.

task" (2004, 262), *Iluka* consisted of a number of blue, orange, green and yellow plasticine balls that were haphazardly thrown onto a nearby road by the artist, two colleagues and an unknown passer-by. Hoffman explains that

depending on their speed, passing cars transform the balls into different sized colour planes. The start of the action is determined by the artist, but the extent and form of the coloured surfaces is determined by the interaction of the possibilities in situ. An adventitious colour field appears ... . (2004, 262)

*Iluka* took place in situ as a site-specific action, incorporating the physical, social and functional qualities of the work's locale. The work maintains its ties to Non-Objective art through the aesthetic framework: the plasticine balls are of a limited selection of primary colours, with their 'squashing' resulting in circular planes of colour. Whilst keeping with the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art, *Iluka* extends beyond modernist autonomy to evoke notions of the social and the local through the use of participation and temporality.

By situating her works within urban locales, Hoffmann's interventions take on an inherently temporal quality; her works either exist for discrete durations that coincide with the artist's exhibition at a nearby gallery, or the interventions are left installed indefinitely, only to slowly deteriorate and disappear. In discussing *Iluka*, Hoffman explains that the work "remains visible for only a limited period of time. Once *Iluka* has been formed by the speed of the cars flattening the plasticine balls, the same process continually undoes the artwork till the traffic gradually regains the road" (2004, 262). The material qualities of plasticine, as unable to remain unsullied by its surrounds, aids this process. As do the participatory facets of much of Hoffmann's work, this temporal, ephemeral materiality works to tie the artwork to its surrounds, acknowledging the fluctuating nature of the urban environment as the work and its locale shift and change together. Whilst the AC4CA interventions are also temporary in that some wall paintings may exist for a time before being replaced by a new painting, it is a *different* kind of temporality, and one that is not determined by the materials of the artwork, the surrounding environment, or the intent of the artist.

Hoffman's plasticine interventions demonstrate an expansion of Non-Objective practice beyond the museum or art gallery, into the public domain. Writer Konrad Bitterli describes Hoffmann's work as declaring its "autonomy as a pure art object on the one hand, and on the other hand, by its intention as a permanent countermovement—the work is committed in a social context" (2004, 259). Hence, the work maintains an allegiance to autonomy and the non-referential through an appropriation of the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art, yet at the same time, 'counters' its autonomy through the synergy created with its surrounds, and reciprocity with its social context, making reference to things outside of its own formal properties; the road, the passers-by and other contingent factors.

I identify Hoffmann's practice as merging Non-Objective practice with a more situated approach to the specificities of locale, and in particular the temporal, social and functional aspects of the urban, public environment. Within an Australian context, the vast majority of Non-Objective works made in the public domain remain tied to notions of autonomy and formalism, where the content of the work is determined by the formal relationships between compositional elements, and the social, political and historical conditions of site are of little significance. Where Hoffmann's works are generally oriented towards the functional and the social conditions specific to particular urban sites, in my work for this project I have aimed to extend such innovations to include the political, the historical, and folklore as conditions of the urban domain that may be potentially engaged, included and referenced through a Non-Objective framework. In drawing on the contemporary discourse of situated practice, I have investigated strategies for producing situated Non-Objective artworks that engage the physical, historical and sociopolitical facets of various locales, incorporating these components as physical and conceptual components of the artwork.



# 2

## A situated practice

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This chapter outlines the principles and methods that inform my understanding of a situated practice, and how they have been used to investigate the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice within this project. Firstly, the writings of Claire Doherty and Miwon Kwon are used to establish the expansion of contemporary site-based art practices beyond the physical parameters of the gallery's interior spaces, and out into the urban, public domain. This is followed by an analysis of the discursive site, where it is explained that whilst historically site-specific art practices were driven by a response to the physical characteristics of the art gallery, current artistic engagements with site are informed by a more discursive range of criteria including various social, political and historical conditions.

Secondly, the decennial *Skulptur Projekte Münster* (1977–) exhibitions are used to present an approach to producing artwork in response to a site, where contextual reference becomes part of the artwork's physical and conceptual content. The practice of artist Francis Alÿs is analysed in establishing a number of specific methods that are used as part of this project to produce situated artworks.

Ultimately I understand situated practice to be an approach to creative practice that is cognisant of the social, cultural, political, and historical conditions that constitute locale, and is directed by these conditions in producing artwork that may contest, agitate or illuminate them. As part of this project the methods and principles of situated practice are employed in conjunction with the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art to produce artworks in response to various urban locales. At the end of this chapter, I present dialectics as a methodology for creative practice, and explain how it has been used as an analytical tool in investigating the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice.

### A situated practice

The term 'situated' is used by Doherty to describe a number of artistic practices that take place as their impetus, producing artworks that come into being as



projects, events, or interventions in the public sphere. The opening statement of Doherty's essay *The New Situationists* reads: "Situations describes the conditions under which many contemporary artworks now come into being" (2004, 7). She goes on to describe 'situated' as referring to those artistic practices that take a 'situation' or 'context' as the point of departure for the process of making art (7). It follows that 'situated artworks' occur in situ beyond the confines of the museum or gallery space, as works "made in context, the product of a 'situated', rather than studio-based artistic practice" (Doherty 2004, 8).

Founded by Doherty in 2002, Situations is a visual arts organisation based in Bristol, UK, that commissions and produces projects by contemporary artists for public sites. Situations describes itself as approaching public art commissioning from a:

more dynamic understanding of place than a physical site, inviting artists to contribute to the lived experience of a place ... as a set of conditions, locations, people, moments in time and circumstance.  
(2013, About Situations)

It appears from their mission statement that the organisation is attempting to separate itself from other modes of public art commissioning that take the physical location of the city square, park or terrace as the site for public art. Instead, Situations is interested in those artistic projects that take a community, historical event or social issue as their site. This motivation is exemplary of a tendency across the discourse of contemporary site-oriented art practice to produce works that resist a fixed physical location, and instead embrace transience over permanence, and action over the static object.

As part of the *One Day Sculpture* series of temporary public artworks that took place across various sites in New Zealand in 2009, artist Roman Ondák created the artwork *Camouflaged Building* (2009) in response to the Old Government Buildings in Wellington (Figure 2.1). Max Delaney writes that the Old Government Buildings "is the largest wooden building in the southern hemisphere" (2011, 2) with an exterior camouflaged to "resemble a structure made of precious stone" (2). Ondák's intervention involved placing small piles of sawdust around the

perimeter of this building, “suggesting an institution not so much on the brink of collapse, but being undone by subtle, yet significant changes” (3). In doing so, the artist “appropriates the authority of a government building” (4) employing the sociopolitical connotations of the buildings as part of the work.

Delaney explains that “given the humble materiality of Ondák’s work, our attention was drawn not to the art itself, but to the context in which it was situated—and the life going on around it” (2011, 4). Delaney makes an important point fundamental to the notion of a situated practice—that the work is not simply the various inconspicuous (and easy to miss) piles of sawdust, but is rather the collective *affect* of these piles on their surrounds, and the sociopolitical connotations that emerge out of this relationship. The ‘site’ of Ondák’s work is thus not simply the physical location of the piles around the perimeter of the Old Government Buildings, but is instead made up of the physical and material qualities of the building, its status as an institution of authority and the inconspicuous yet subversive qualities afforded to the piles of sawdust in this context. Conceptually, the artwork’s ‘site’ is thus not limited to the parameters of a physical location, but is instead comprised of a range of discursive factors, including the materiality of the building and its symbolic authority.

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Figure 2.1 Roman Ondák, *Camouflaged Building*, 2009, public artwork.

### **The discursive site**

Doherty's definition of contemporary situated practice is largely based on earlier innovations of site-specific art and the 'sited exhibition'. In her book *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, Miwon Kwon provides a detailed genealogy of site-specificity, describing how "site-specific work in its earliest formation ... focused on establishing an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site, and demanded the physical presence of the viewer for the work's completion" (2004, 11–12). According to Kwon, the relationship between an artwork and its site was originally gallery-based, and inherently physical, where site-specific practices "initially took the site as an actual location, a tangible reality, its identity composed of a unique combination of physical elements: length, depth, height, texture, and shape of walls and rooms" (11). Kwon explains that over time, as the site for art expanded beyond the gallery and museum space and into other spaces, so has the emphasis on the physical context for art been lessened, and replaced with other discursive criteria.

Kwon proposes that whilst the origins of site-specificity belong to an interrogation of the physical and institutional facets of the gallery space, a "dominant drive of site-oriented practices today is the pursuit of a more intense engagement with the outside world and everyday life—a critique of culture that is inclusive of nonart spaces, nonart institutions, and nonart issues" (24). It is here that Kwon identifies a shift in terms, where "the site of art begins to diverge from the literal space of art, and the physical condition of a specific location recedes as the primary element in the conception of a site" (19). In other words, as contemporary site-based artistic practices have increasingly moved towards a direct engagement with the public domain and spaces beyond the art institution in the formation of artwork, the conception of site has changed from a physical location to a more discursive intersection of various socially, politically and historically oriented impulses. In summary, what might be described as a 'discursive site-specificity' is "organized by its engagement with social issues" (Demos 2003, 98) rather than geographical or material terrain (98).

Kwon summarises this point:

The distinguishing characteristic of today's site-oriented art is the way in which the art work's relationship to the actuality of a location (as site) and the social conditions of the institutional frame (as site) are both subordinate to a *discursively* determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate. (2004, 26)

For this project I have drawn on the notion of the discursive site to produce artworks in response to various urban locales. These artworks aim to in some way appropriate, engage or illuminate the sociopolitical, historical and physical conditions of site in the production of situated artworks. The *Skulptur Projekte Münster* exhibition is used as an exemplar in identifying a shift in site-based art practices from a response to the physical conditions of site to more sociopolitically oriented responses to locale.

### **Skulptur Projekte Münster**

*Skulptur Projekte Münster* is a decennial exhibition that sees the city of Münster in Germany temporarily transform into a sited exhibition, with various sculptural works scattered across the city. Writing in *Places with a Past: New Site-Specific Art at Charleston's Spoleto Festival*, Mary Jane Jacob discusses the emergence of what she terms 'site exhibitions' in the late 1980s, as a newly established category within contemporary art accommodating for the "widespread phenomenon of [artists] working both outside the studio and outside the museum" (Jacob 1991, quoted in Doherty 2009, 198). Jacob identifies the *Skulptur Projekte Münster* of 1987 as a poignant example of the sited exhibition, stating:

The overall involvement of artists in planning projects for Münster led to the exploitation of contextual rather than purely formal relationships ... [resulting in] artistic interventions, that drew their meaning from the site that the artists selected. (198)

Jacob discusses another seminal sited exhibition titled *TSWA 3D* also held in 1987, and involving eleven public artworks exhibited across nine cities in Britain. Jacob describes how the exhibiting artists deliberately integrated artworks with site, where the conditions of context were used by the artists as “part of the concept as well as part of the physicality of a work” (199). This attitude to producing artworks in response to site, where the site informs both the form and the content of the artwork, is central to my understanding of situated practice.

Doherty refers to *Skulptur Projekte Münster* as an exemplary model in describing the emergence and development of situated practice. In the Introduction to *Situation, Documents of Contemporary Art*, she argues that in contrast to the four earlier iterations of *Skulptur Projekte Münster* that seemed to present a “genealogy of site-specificity” (2009, 13), the 2007 *Skulptur Projekte Münster 07* appeared more concerned with notions of “place, locality, time, context and space, rather than a fixed, physical notion of site” (13). Evidenced by an array of “projects, events, interventions, happenings, small gestures and spectacular intrusions over time” (13), Doherty describes these artworks as “*situational* rather than site specific” (12). In summary, while historically site-specificity might be thought of as forging a physical relationship between the artwork and the gallery space, situated practice engages the facets of location beyond the physical notions of site to include other discursive criteria: the social, the political and the historical.<sup>21</sup>

Whilst *Skulptur Projekte Münster* is one project amongst many international site-oriented projects, programs and exhibitions that currently operate, I identify this particular decennial exhibition as exemplifying the principles central to the

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21. Writer Lucy Lippard makes a similar distinction to Doherty, between earlier notions of site-specificity and contemporary approaches to site-based art. Where Doherty refers to these contemporary practices as ‘situational’, Lippard uses the term ‘Place-specific art’, and explains, “Site-specific art conforms to the topographic details of the ground on which the work rests and/or to the components of its immediate natural or built environment” (1997, 275) whereas “Place-specific art may incorporate some or all of these elements but can add a social dimension that refers to the human history and memory, land use and political agendas relevant to the *specific place*” (275).

discourse of situated practice. Within the Glossary of the catalogue for *Skulptur Projekte Münster 07* writer Knut Ebeling succinctly asserts the increasing importance of 'site' across contemporary art theory and practice, stating:

site plays just as central a role as the work once did. Today, the situational reference is part of a contemporary artwork's standard equipment ... The contemporary artwork defines, demarcates, inspires and transforms sites. It has become a site-defining—and thus also a site-dependent—undertaking. (2007, 449)

This summation from Ebeling reflects the defining feature of situated practice—the assertion that site and 'situational reference' is a resource to be used, contested, and appropriated in the production of contemporary artwork. Particular methods that I have identified as central to situated practice are presented in the following sections through an analysis of the practice of Alÿs.

### **Francis Alÿs**

Some of the artworks and practices that fall within Doherty's notion of the 'situated' are community projects, 'social works' and relational events, where viewer participation and interaction are integral components. Within the context of this project I am less interested in those situated artworks that involve direct collaboration with a community and the active participation of the viewer, and more interested in those that involve the subtle gesture, action or intervention made in the public domain, whereby the pedestrian, by-stander and passer-by are implicated as viewers. The practice of Belgian artist Alÿs reflects this approach to producing artworks in the public domain. Alÿs' practice involves a number of interventionist methods that the artist uses to create works in response to various situations, and I will analyse selected artworks by Alÿs to establish the nature of these methods.

Alÿs came to prominence in the 1990s through a series of works that the artist refers to as 'paseos' (walks). These early actions took place in Mexico City, Mexico, and São Paulo, Brazil, and involved the artist performing durational actions in the street, such as pulling a magnetic toy car behind him and collecting street detritus

in *The Collector* (1990–1992), carrying a leaking can of paint to trace a line in *The Leak* (1995), and whilst walking, unravelling a sweater through a loose thread, in *Fairy Tales* (1995). Such works are referred to by many commentators as allegories for larger issues that reflect the “the social situation and the modernization process that may at times seem suspended in Mexico, and further Latin America” (Yoshizaki 2013, 95–96). In analysing Alÿs’ practice, writer Yukie Kamiya explains that “while making subtle interventions in the urban everyday, Alÿs confronts the sociopolitical issues, irrationalities, unsettled deadlock situations that surface there ... He awakens our imagination and in doing so, agitates those situations from a different vantage point” (2013, 107).

In a 1997 work titled *Paradox of Praxis* (Sometimes Doing Something Leads to Nothing) Alÿs pushed a block of ice through the streets of Mexico City for nine hours, until the block eventually melted (Figure 2.2). Discussing this work, Kamiya writes:

Alÿs brings to light the reality and paradox of labor in society through the exhausting physical labour of pushing ice ... and the unrewarding outcome of the ice literally coming to nothing in the end. Through this

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Figure 2.2 Francis Alÿs, *Paradox of Praxis* (*Sometimes Doing Something Leads to Nothing*), 1997, photographic documentation of an action.

physical challenge projected against the cityscape, the artist appears to be adapting to the city itself, but while doing so he gradually begins to insert critical interpretations of the reality he acutely senses from his distinctive perspective as a newcomer, or outsider. (2013, 107)

*Paradox of Praxis* functions as a situated artwork—an action that occurred *in* the urban environment, directly within the ebb and flow of the public domain. It is also ‘situated’ in the sense that the context of the work informs its content; as a motif, the block of ice “represents an essential item for a Mexican street vendor” (Kamiya 2013, 107), and the apparent futility of the action alludes to the reality of labour in this society, with a critical tone. Alÿs uses the action to reflect contemporary sociopolitical issues of the situation.

Other works by Alÿs involve more subtle interventions within the urban environment, made through the careful arrangement of objects, or quiet observation and documentation of things as they are. In a work titled *Placing Pillows* (1990), Alÿs inserted pillows into the frames of broken windows around the historic centre of Mexico City. Five years prior, the city had been victim to an earthquake that had killed several thousand people. In *Francis Alÿs: Stories of Deception* the text accompanying the documentation of *Placing Pillows* reads: “while social organisations and new political movements were attempting to capture the quasi-anarchic spirit of civil solidarity, Alÿs brought to the ruins subtle gestures of symbolic healing” (Alÿs and Medina 2010, 49). Equally as subtle and understated is the series of works begun in 1999 titled *Sleepers*. The work consists of the photographic documentation of people and dogs sleeping on the pavement and various benches in urban settings. Here, “Alÿs registers the private use of the street as an amicable domestic space against the concept of traffic and civil regulation which has virtually become the despotic regime of urban life in the West” (97). In both works, we see the artist responding to the urban environment in a way that reflects a broader situation—the ruins of a city under repair and the publicness of homelessness. Kamiya suggests that “through these artistic practices, Alÿs observed the situations in front of him, seeking a way into discussion rather than providing a solution” (2013, 109).



By situating the artwork outside of the museum or gallery space and directly within the urban environment, the social, political, physical and historical conditions of this environment can become part of the work's content. Whilst acknowledging a certain simplification of an extensive and complex artistic practice,<sup>22</sup> for the purposes of this project the approaches taken by Alÿs in the creation of artworks have been categorised into three methods: the artist performs an action (*Paradox of Praxis*), creates an intervention through the installation of an object (*Placing Pillows*), or documents existing phenomena for presentation (*Sleepers*). In each method, the content of the work is directed by its context; the two become reciprocal, indivisible entities. For this project I have employed these methods in conjunction with the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art to produce a body of artwork.

Being 'situated' is an approach to creative practice based on working in situ, where the specificities and particularities of place and context provide a point of departure for artistic practice. Whilst the term has been used by Doherty in relation to the practice of many different artists, I identify two fundamental principles that define my understanding of a situated practice: [1] the situated artwork exists or occurs beyond the confines of the gallery or museum and comes into being within the public domain; and [2] where the physical, historical, social and political conditions specific to this domain are in some way incorporated as part of the artwork's content, meaning or value. This project sees the methods and principles central to situated practice used in conjunction with the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective practice, to investigate the production of artworks that are both situated *and* Non-Objective. Overarching the project is an understanding of dialectics, which is used as a method for negotiating the fundamental differences between two conflicting discourses: the Non-Objective and the situated.

### **Dialectics**

The Non-Objective and the situated are modes of contemporary art practice informed by differing ideologies. The former is a term that has come to describe

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22. In conjunction with actions and interventions made in the street, Alÿs' practice also involves painting and video, which is analysed in more depth in Chapter Five.

varying modes of formalist, abstract and non-figurative artistic practices that are historically based on modernist painting; the latter is a mode of interventionist engagement with the public sphere founded on the notion of site-specificity. Writer Douglas Crimp surmises that, “the idealism of Modernist art, in which the art object *in and of itself* was seen to have a fixed and transhistorical meaning” (Crimp 1993, quoted in Kwon 2004, 169) determined the autonomy of an artwork, its transcendence of context. Contrastingly, “site-specificity opposed that idealism—and unveiled the material system it obscured—by its refusal of circulatory mobility, its belongingness to a *specific* site” (169). Whilst the modernist artwork sought transcendence from context, site-specific artwork remains intrinsically bound to it.

Inherent to my investigation into a situated Non-Objective practice are a number of contradictions. The situated artwork is by nature embedded both physically and conceptually within its surrounds, and refers to the social, historical and political conditions found there—whereas the Non-Objective artwork is historically defined by its autonomy—it refers only to itself. Also, where the objecthood or facture of the Non-Objective artwork is paramount to its content, the situated artwork often emerges as an intervention, action or immaterial gesture. Such oppositional methods and principles raise the question of how the creative outcomes of this project can be both Non-Objective *and* situated.

The term dialectics describes a method of argument that resolves opposing positions. In an interview with Ben Curnow, Australian artist John Nixon describes how for him “dialectics provides a type of methodological reasoning ... [to] maintain a dialogue between opposites” (Nixon 1994, Interview with Ben Curnow). Nixon explains that within his creative practice, he uses dialectics “as an instrument of logic and understanding” in relationship to various binaries, “Art and Life, Matter and Poetry, Art and Anti-Art” (Interview with Ben Curnow). In this project I use dialectics as a method for approaching, negotiating and synthesising the oppositional impulses and attitudes that inform situated and Non-Objective practices.

In an article titled “Dialectics as a Method”, sociologist Howard Sherman presents dialectics as a method for use within the social sciences. Sherman begins by tracing the emergence and development of dialectics through the works of various

philosophers, and makes an important distinction between Hegelian and Marxist dialectics. In summarising the works of these philosophers, Sherman describes Hegel's universe as one of ideal concepts rather than "our familiar material or social universe" (1976, 57) and as such Hegel's dialectic is "idealist in the sense that it deals with the development of disembodied ideas" (58). In contrast, Marx's dialectic "is materialist in the sense that it deals with the development of scientific concepts by human beings to understand the changing material and social world" (58). It follows that for Hegel, dialectics is a system or ontology—a "totally known picture of the whole universe" (58), where for Marx, dialectics is not an ontology or a system, but is rather a "flexible tool of analysis ... [a] non-dogmatic method of approach to problems of science or politics or everyday life" (58).

After outlining this distinction between Hegelian dialectics and Marxist dialectics, Sherman extrapolates from the analytical nature of Marx's dialectic to sketch a "dialectic methodology for the social sciences" (1976, 61). Sherman presents a set of general "Rules of Dialectic Method", one of which is titled "Negation of Negation" (62). He explains that "when one aspect of a process seems to completely eliminate or negate an opposed aspect, ask if it in turn may be eliminated. Ask if the result may be something quite new. Ask in what ways it may supersede or include the old aspects" (62). This 'rule' in particular is reflective of how I have used dialectics as a method for creative practice for this project. For example where the autonomous nature of the Non-Objective artwork would negate the contextual specificities crucial to the situated artwork, dialectics has been used as a method to negotiate these oppositional processes and investigate the potential for appropriate syntheses. In this way the creative outcomes of this project may be "something quite new" (62) as Sherman says, or may include aspects of both the Non-Objective and the situated. Sherman's rules are suggestive rather than specific, but he posits that in their looseness they may provide "approaches to the social sciences, to everyday problems, to political tactics, [and] to the formation of methodology itself" (62). As part of this project I have used dialectics as a methodology for creative practice, a means to investigate the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice.

As established in Chapter One, this project aims to act on what I have identified as a gap in knowledge, and to investigate the potential for Non-Objective practice to operate beyond the bounds of the gallery space or museum and engage the social, political and historical conditions of the urban, public environment. In the following chapter, I analyse a body of artwork that I have made in response to the wall paintings of the AC4CA, and my early attempts to negotiate a dialectical space between the Non-Objective and the situated.



# 3

## Autonomy, actions and the AC4CA

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In this chapter I present selected outcomes made as part of a body of artwork titled *Actions/AC4CA* begun in 2012. The body of artwork is a series of interventionist responses to the Non-Objective wall paintings of the Australian Centre for Concrete Art (AC4CA). Before analysing these outcomes, I will first draw on a summary of Michael Fried's text *Art and Objecthood* to outline the conditions of Fried's 'exemplary modernist artwork.' I then identify a correlation between these conditions and the writings of Julian Goddard, Director of the AC4CA, to establish that the wall paintings of the AC4CA are informed by modernist autonomy. Using this correlation as a lens to both assess and respond to the wall paintings of the AC4CA, the artworks made as part of *Actions/AC4CA* attempt to undermine the autonomy of the AC4CA wall paintings by 'situating' them in relation to the physical and functional conditions of their surrounds.

Secondly, the use of readymade objects and materials within the body of work *Actions/AC4CA* is analysed and contextualised in relation to a select group of contemporary Australian artists who use readymade materials to produce Non-Objective artworks. Various artworks by these artists are analysed in establishing a method for creative practice that I refer to as 'objectification'. Artworks that I have made as part of *Actions/AC4CA* are then analysed in terms of the objectification of readymade materials, as well as the different ways that they work to situate the AC4CA wall paintings in relation to their surroundings. Objectification is established as an effective method for producing situated Non-Objective artworks, and is used in subsequent bodies of work.

Relative to my investigation into the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice, *Actions/AC4CA* functions as a case study –a series of initial exploratory attempts to situate existing Non-Objective artworks within the public domain. Out of this body of work a number of strategies have emerged that have been used to produce other situated Non-Objective artworks in response to various other locales, which are discussed further in the following chapters.

### **Fried and autonomy**

In 1967 American art critic Michael Fried published what would become an infamous critique of Minimalism, titled *Art and Objecthood*. Fried's book was written as a critique of what he termed the theatricality of the Minimalist objects, which he argued was a threat to the autonomy of art. According to Fried the Minimalist artwork brought attention to the work's surroundings and the viewer's experience, drawing attention away from the internal relations of the artwork, and thus making one's experience of the work indistinguishable from one's more general experience of the world. The following extract is a summary of Fried's argument presented by artist and writer David Batchelor in his book *Minimalism*:

In Fried's account ... the exemplary modernist work of art is autonomous ... in the sense that its value resides entirely within the work. It exists as if it were entirely independent of its surroundings, and more importantly, as if the viewer did not exist ... In viewing such work, the argument goes, the viewer is able to leave aside any local contextual consideration. Or more to the point, the contingencies of the viewer's time and place are put aside by the work. (1997, 67)

I identify a correlation between Fried's argument for the autonomy of the modernist artwork and Goddard's writings on the wall paintings of the AC4CA. In a catalogue documenting works of the AC4CA from 2006 to 2011, Goddard explains that although the wall paintings of the AC4CA exist within the public environment, the work "denies any direct political, social or moral position other than to present an aesthetic experience mediated by art in places where that might not be expected" (2011, n.p.). In another of the AC4CA's catalogues, Goddard explains that whilst they "occupy a similar social space to graffiti" (2012, n.p.), which has historically been used as a sociopolitical tool, the AC4CA wall paintings "are not part of that tradition or rhetoric" (n.p.). Instead, "the AC4CA's imagery ... requires no reading, recognition, interpretation or even response—it is just there" (n.p.).

The position that the AC4CA's wall paintings deny any "obvious meaning" (Goddard 2011, n.p.) and are 'just there' without having any signification beyond themselves, suggests that according to Goddard these artworks are autonomous. As presented

in Chapter One, writer Patrick McCaughey described the non-referential nature of the paintings in *The Field* exhibition as inducing a certain autonomy, where

instead of being able to approach the abstract experience of a work through the intermediary of an association external to the painting, we are confronted directly with the experience ... The work of art becomes the autonomous object, independent of any experience external to itself. (McCaughey 1968, 89)

As with the paintings in *The Field*, the non-figurative wall paintings of the AC4CA are described as allowing “the design, pattern, shapes and colours to have their own effect without having to mean anything in a prescribed sense” (Goddard 2011, n.p.). For Goddard, the AC4CA wall paintings operate without reference to context; the content of the painting makes no reference to its surroundings, either socially, politically, historically or physically. I identify Goddard’s position as being aligned with a Friedian modernist autonomy.

In comparing Batchelor’s summary of Fried’s exemplary modernist artwork with the writings of Goddard, a number of correlations emerge. Goddard’s assertion that the AC4CA wall paintings deny any “direct political, social or moral position” (2011, n.p.) despite being located within the public urban domain, resonates with Batchelor’s summation that for Fried the exemplary modernist artwork “exists as if it were entirely independent of its surroundings” (1997, 67) where the “contingencies of the viewer’s time and place” (67) be they the social, political, historical and physical conditions of the public domain “are put aside by the work” (67). I propose that the AC4CA’s supposed transcendence of contextual consideration and their painting’s preclusion of external reference align with Fried’s position that the content or ‘value’ of the modernist artwork “resides entirely within the work” (Batchelor, 1997, 67). This position is at odds with the principles of situated practice, for which contextual reference is paramount to the production of artwork.

In this project, Fried’s notion of the exemplary modernist artwork is used as a lens with which to assess and respond to the wall paintings of the AC4CA. I identify the practice of the AC4CA as attempting to produce wall paintings that operate



autonomously from their urban surrounds, where contextual consideration is superfluous to the content of the artwork. I argue that a gap in knowledge exists between this approach to producing Non-Objective artworks in the public domain and more situated modes of artistic practice, such as those evidenced by artists Leni Hoffmann and Francis Alÿs, where contextual reference to locale is utilised as part of the artwork's physical and conceptual content. Acting on this gap in knowledge and as a means to investigate strategies for creating situated Non-Objective artworks through practice-led research, I have produced a body of artwork in response to the AC4CA's Fremantle wall paintings, titled *Actions/AC4CA*.

Using a Friedan understanding of modernist autonomy as a position to work against and try to refute,<sup>23</sup> I began creating interventions in response to the AC4CA's Fremantle wall paintings. The intent of these interventions was to appropriate or temporarily alter the content of the AC4CA wall paintings in ways that might make them more aligned with, or specific to, their surroundings, as opposed to existing as autonomous or separate from them. I ventured that to somehow emphasise or illuminate the surroundings of the AC4CA wall paintings through an action or intervention might be a way to undermine their supposed autonomy, and instead 'situate' them in relation to their urban context. Unlike the previously discussed *Skulptur Projekte Münster* projects, where artists are invited to create artworks in response to various public sites and urban locations, I was attempting to work backwards—to in effect physically and conceptually *extend* the existing AC4CA wall paintings to incorporate their surroundings as part of their content. In short, I was attempting to blur the line between where a wall painting ended and its surroundings began, as a way to critique the idea that these exist as two separate entities.

Of course the AC4CA wall paintings are already 'situated' in a physical sense—physically *there* on the sides of buildings and car parks, directly within the ebb and

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23. Batchelor's summary of Fried's notion of modernist autonomy was so pivotal to my thinking at the time that I cut it out and sticky-taped it to the front of a note pad that I carried around Fremantle with me, jotting down ideas of ways to respond to the wall paintings—ways to debunk, contest or agitate their supposed autonomy.

flow of Fremantle's urban environment. Thus it was Goddard's positioning of the artworks of the AC4CA that I was more so reacting to, specifically the notion that the content of these public wall paintings were somehow autonomous or isolatable from the social, physical, political and historical conditions of their surroundings. I set out with the intention of fusing, or aligning the content of the AC4CA wall paintings with their context as a way of responding to what I viewed as these artworks' adherence to a Friedman modernist autonomy.

I approached this task initially quite directly and literally. I stood in front of the paintings in the street, photographed them and took notes about their surroundings. Standing in front of the wall paintings themselves offered a different experience than the ones portrayed photographically by the AC4CA on their website and in their catalogues; photographs that contain no people, no one walking their dog, no cyclists—and despite the fact that many of the paintings are located in car parks—no cars. In standing quietly and observing such 'events' (the man, the dog, the car, the cyclist), I began to think about ways that the paintings might be inclusive of these things, as if they might *extend* out from the wall and into the street.

Initial attempts to achieve this 'extension' involved the use of readymade objects. I created relationships between the colours of the AC4CA wall paintings and the colours of found objects and materials. I began to arrange various objects in relation to a painting, with the idea that through proximity and similarity, the objects could momentarily be *a part of* the painting. The use of readymade objects based on their formal qualities of colour and shape became a method that I used to physically extend the painting off the wall and into the street. Before analysing this method and its outcomes in more detail, I will firstly locate my use of readymade objects within a broader field of local artists who employ readymade objects within a Non-Objective framework.

### **Objectification**

Within the practices of a select group of contemporary Australian artists, readymade objects and materials are used to produce Non-Objective artworks. These artists use found objects to create works that reflect the stylistic vocabulary of Non-

Objective art, and are simultaneously infused with external reference through the connotations and associative qualities of the objects used. Ultimately these practices maintain their ties to a Non-Objective ideology through a process of 'objectification', where found objects and materials are reduced to colours and forms. To 'objectify' is to degrade or reduce something to the status of mere object. I have appropriated this term to describe a method that appears consistently throughout the work of a select group of local practitioners. Objectification is employed by Australian artists Trevor Richards, Jurek Wybraniec and Daniel Argyle amongst others as a method for *reducing* objects to formal, compositional elements; shapes, colours, lines, and forms.

*BYOG* (an acronym for Blue Yellow Orange Green) is an ongoing project initiated by artist Trevor Richards in 1999. The project sees Richards construct a body of work within a self-imposed restriction, where specific tones of blue, yellow, orange and green provide the fundamental compositional elements (Goddard, 2004b, 8). These limitations have led Richards to produce a large number of Non-Objective artworks that incorporate found objects and materials. For his artwork titled *ASK*, exhibited at the International Art Space Kellerberrin Australia (IASKA) in 2001, Richards asked the local residents of the small town of Kellerberrin to donate objects to him that would correspond to one of the four BYOG colours. Writing

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Figure 3.1 Trevor Richards, *ASK*, 2001, installation.

about *ASK* in the catalogue for Richard's solo exhibition at PICA in 2004, Goddard describes that "by supplying the local townspeople with swatches they were able to match an amazing plethora of objects used in their day-to-day living and to bring them to the gallery for sorting into four colours" (2004b, 8). Richards then presented the collected objects on the walls of the IASKA gallery space in their four colour groups (Figure 3.1).

The installation of *ASK* in the IASKA gallery space resembled a large colour field painting, made up of panels of blue, yellow, orange and green. However unlike a colour field painting, these 'panels' are not painted, but instead are comprised of an array of objects that when arranged together resemble a field of colour. Goddard writes "when this work is seen the first thing that strikes you is that it is somehow strange that there might be so many things in the world that are of an almost identical colour" (2004b, 8). Indeed despite their differences in texture and scale, their differing functions and origins, as well as their various domestic, industrial, personal and cultural connotations, Richards' assemblage of these objects reduces them to colours; they are objectified.

In a catalogue accompanying the 1999 exhibition *Beyond the Grid* at IASKA, writer Marco Marcon succinctly describes the undermining tendencies of Wybraniec's practice.

The systematic character of Wybraniec's approach is linked to two main historical sources: American Minimalism and the European tradition of Concrete Art ... Wybraniec chooses to deliberately disrupt the rigorous methodology of these historical models by introducing heterodox elements such as ... symbolically loaded found objects ... . (1999, 20)

Marcon explains that the function of such "heterogeneous elements is to intersperse oblique though recognisable references to popular culture, art history, psychological and psychoanalytical realities, everyday urban and domestic space" (1999, 20). Whilst the reductive tendencies of Non-Objective art and the doctrines of Minimalism and Concrete art are "still prominent" in Wybraniec's works, they have been 'contaminated' and stretched via the "detritus of everyday life" (20).

Materials associated with the industrial and the suburban appear consistently throughout Wybraniec's oeuvre. Writer Sophie O'Brien explains that the artist uses "industrially produced materials that are easily obtained in the urban environment. The materials are not those of gleaming Minimalism, but the more modest pegboard or corrugated plastic found in local hardware stores" (2002, 135). Like Richards' *ASK*, Wybraniec uses these materials with care and "with little revision" (O'Brien 2002, 135) as if to honour both their inherent formal and associative qualities. In regards to the treatment of materials within Wybraniec's practice, O'Brien suggests that "careful attention is paid to the nature of the objects—their 'thinghood'—and the consequences of arrangement and process" (135). Whilst Wybraniec's practice responds to and engages the history of abstraction, and reflects the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art, the particular social and cultural connotations of the materials used, allude to "both DIY and Australian pop aesthetics" (Marcon 1999, 20) and exhibit an overtly personal account of the "domestic world" (20).

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Figure 3.2 Daniel Argyle, *Untitled*, 1998, hand-dyed nylon carpet, 244 x 28 x 8 cm.

Daniel Argyle is another artist who like Richards and Wybraniec infiltrates the conventionally non-referential ideology of Non-Objective art with ubiquitous, readymade materials to undermining effect. In *Untitled (series 6 #1)* made in 1998, strips of various coloured duct tape are fixed to a piece of paper, resembling a stripe painting.<sup>24</sup> Whilst the coloured tapes function compositionally as coloured stripes, they are simultaneously identifiable as objects, as strips of duct tape, a cheap and common material. Similarly, Argyle's carpet works—large plank-like wooden structures covered in coloured carpet—resemble the leaning Minimalist planks of American artist John McCracken (Figure 3.2). However where McCracken's works were constructed using ultra-reflexive industrial perspex or mirror, Argyle's are somewhat comically made of brightly coloured carpet. Both the carpet and the duct tape is isolated from their conventional domestic context, objectified and appropriated for their formal qualities.

What is significant about these practices and their use of readymade materials is that the isolation of the materials' formal properties from their connotative qualities through objectification is not fully achieved. Whilst the materials used are objectified and reduced to formal, compositional elements through colour relationships (Richards) or through geometric arrangement (Wybraniec and Argyle) they simultaneously retain their identity as *objects*, as if belonging to both art and the outside world. Writing about Richards' *ASK* and the works later iteration titled *BYOG Katowice*,<sup>25</sup> writer Margaret Moore makes a statement that holds true across all of the works that I have described that evidence the method of objectification, writing,

These works are as unspectacular as they are intriguing and beautiful, embedded within a culture of artists who find or construct an aesthetic in mass-produced objects. They rely on associational reading and

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24. A stripe painting is a trope of Non-Objective art that typically sees the picture plane divided into coloured planes or stripes.

25. Richards made a work similar to *ASK* during a residency in Basel, Switzerland in 2008. Like *ASK*, the work *BYOG Katowice* involved the artist collecting coloured objects from the residents of Katowice, which were then exhibited within a gallery space.

invite narrative through memory of, or personal use of the many objects that form the work. (2009, 5)

Moore's comment succinctly describes a number of practices and artworks within Australia that straddle both the sphere of pure (or seemingly pure) formal abstraction or the Non-Objective, as well as the world of recognisable forms, the commonplace and the everyday.

The significance of the method of objectification as conveyed in the work of these local Non-Objective artists is twofold; it firstly expands the syntax of Non-Objective art to include readymade materials and objects, and in doing so, works to refute the dominant paradigm of modernist autonomy through the associative qualities of the materials used. The works become multi-referential as opposed to strictly self-referential. The use of readymade materials, and the objectification of these materials, allows artists to create works with 'a foot in each camp'; one in the Non-Objective sphere of flat colour and hard-edged geometry, and one in the world of everyday forms, in the realm of the social. I identify this twofold relationship as dialectical, in that the domestic connotations of Argyle's carpets for example do not refute the work's relationship to the Non-Objective, nor does the reductive aesthetic of the work restrict or evade the materials domestic connotations. The two readings exist together, dialectically, without one negating the other.

I recognise objectification as a potential method for creating artworks that reflect the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art, whilst at the same time incorporating sociopolitical, historical and other site-oriented contextual references through the connotations and associative qualities of the objects used. With this project I intend to contribute to this discourse and community of practice by appropriating the method of objectification to create artworks in direct response to locales through actions and arrangements made in situ. Within an Australian context, the use of readymade materials in the production of Non-Objective artworks is largely restricted to artworks made for gallery display, and thus I identify an opportunity for more in situ, situated interventions and actions to be investigated.

## Actions/AC4CA

The method of objectification appears consistently throughout my early attempts to situate the AC4CA wall paintings within their surroundings, and to refute or deny their supposed autonomy. The work *Composition with Capsicum* (2012) was made in response to *AC4CA Project 7*, a large five-storey car park in the centre of Fremantle. In 2003, the AC4CA was commissioned to design a new painted façade and interior for Fremantle's Queensgate car park. Designed by member of the group artist Alex Spremberg, in the style of Concrete art, the external sections of the car park were painted in bright blue, yellow and orange (Figure 3.3). The large sections of coloured slabs, pillars and walls operate like a three dimensional hard-edged abstract painting, punctuating Fremantle's cityscape.

*Composition with Capsicum* is an intervention involving a capsicum placed on top of a Telstra telephone booth (Figure 3.4). The yellow capsicum against the orange and blue signage of the telephone booth mirrors the colour arrangement of the AC4CA's artwork *AC4CA Project 7* located across the road. It is this mirroring or formal correlation between the painted car park and my intervention that works to 'objectify' the capsicum/telephone booth arrangement, reducing these objects to sections of colour; orange, yellow and blue.



Figure 3.3 Alex Spremberg, *AC4CA Project 7*, 2003, acrylic paint on walls and ceilings.





Figure 3.4 David Attwood, *Composition with Capsicum*, 2012, intervention.

In returning to Hoffmann's intervention *Valis* analysed in Chapter One, where the grass median strip and the road adjacent to her plasticine intervention were appropriated and included as "graphical elements" that existed as a part of the artwork, *Composition with Capsicum* attempts to similarly include the physical surroundings of AC4CA Project 7 as compositional elements. In mirroring the arrangement of the colours used in the AC4CA wall painting by appropriating a nearby telephone booth, the intervention attempts to *extend* the painting, incorporating the car park's physical surroundings as part of the work's content. This extension attempted to undermine the notion that the wall painting is an autonomous entity, with its content (the formal arrangement of colours and shapes) operating independently of its surroundings.

A failing of the work *Composition with Capsicum* is that whilst the capsicum's formal properties (its particular yellow) worked with the colours of the Telstra telephone booth to mirror the colours of the adjacent AC4CA wall painting, the functional, and associative qualities of the capsicum as an object contributed little to the intervention's content. In other words, the intervention made use of a capsicum because it was yellow, and not because the capsicum as an object had a particular resonance, pertinence or relevance to the situation. In the previously analysed work by artist Francis Alÿs *Paradox of Praxis*, the block of ice that Alÿs pushed through the streets of Mexico City had a particular sociopolitical significance to that situation, and directly informed the work's content.<sup>26</sup> Within the context of this research project and in relation to the method of objectification, what would be more successful than the *Composition with Capsicum* intervention would be for the cultural connotations of the object(s) used to in some way reflect or engage the historical, social or political conditions of the site, as well as function formally as a compositional element within a Non-Objective framework.

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26. To return to Alÿs' work *Paradox of Praxis* (1997) as an example, the block of ice that the artist pushes through the streets has a specific sociopolitical resonance with the situation—the block of ice is integral to the day-to-day life of the street vendor, and thus artistic content aligns with context. Similarly in his work *Placing Pillows* (1990), the materiality of the pillow inserted in the broken and shattered window frames of inner city buildings alludes to a gesture of healing and repair.



Figure 3.5 David Attwood, *The coincidence*, 2012, photograph.

A work titled *The coincidence* (2012) was also made in response to the AC4CA painted car park titled *AC4CA Project 7*. *The coincidence* is a photograph that presents a formal relationship between a parked car and one side of the car park's painted rooftop tower; both are of an almost identical yellow (Figure 3.5). Within the photograph the bright yellow wall of the AC4CA painting works to objectify the car, reducing it to a fundamental property—its colour, and for an instant it's as if the AC4CA painting extends to include the car as part of its composition. What is significant about *The coincidence* is that by 'objectifying' a parked car, the work alludes to the AC4CA wall painting's function as a car park; thus a relationship emerges between the object being objectified and its site. In again referring to Batchelor's summary of Fried's modernist autonomy, where context is said to be 'put aside' by the work, it follows that by making reference to the functional context of the artwork *AC4CA Project 7* as a car park, the work is no longer autonomous, but is instead situated. Where the AC4CA seemingly precludes the function of the car park and any other characteristics associated with its locale in its appropriation as a Concrete artwork, my work *The coincidence* appropriates the method of objectification to foreground the wall painting's functional context as a car park.

Another work titled *Black and White Henry St* (2012) involved a number of temporary sculptures made of found black and white objects that were assembled on the bitumen floor of a car park on Henry Street, adjacent to the black and white wall painting *AC4CA Project 15* (Figure 3.6). Like the previously analysed work *ASK* made in Kellerberrin by Richards, the arrangements presented in *Black and White Henry St* were made up of collected common, recognisable objects, in this case restricted to black and white. Where the nature of the collected objects in *ASK* were determined by Richards' self-imposed restriction and commitment to the BYOG colours, my collection of black and white objects was made in response to the composition of the AC4CA wall painting. This was an attempt to *extend* the wall painting off the wall and into the car park—as if the black and white forms were temporarily compositional elements. The correlation between the composition of the wall painting and the objects would work to foreground this formal relationship, effectively objectifying the materials and reducing the street detritus to Non-Objective black and white forms.



Figure 3.6 David Attwood, *Black and White Henry St*, 2012, intervention.





Figure 3.7 David Attwood, *Black and White Henry St* (detail), 2012, intervention.

Whilst the work *Black and White Henry St* shares similarities with Richards' *ASK*, it is the differences that speak more loudly of the intentions of the work, and how it means to address the notion of a situated Non-Objective art practice. For *ASK*, Richards collected a range of objects donated by the Kellerberrin public and presented them within the IASKA gallery space. Where Richards removed these objects from their original contexts and presented them within a gallery space, I have employed a more situated approach. Over a period of weeks, I collected discarded black and white objects from urban spaces such as footpaths, train stations, alleyways, car parks, ovals, parks, and back roads around Fremantle, and then assembled them back into one of these urban spaces—a car park on Henry Street. The nature of these objects as ubiquitous street detritus had a correlation with the space in which they were assembled as sculptures; these objects, including bottle tops, bus tickets, straws, wrappers, cigarettes and beer bottles are commonly found *in* car parks (Figure 3.7). In this way, and in line with the previously discussed objectification of the parked car in *The coincidence*, the sculptures had a direct and assimilative correlation with the site. *Black and White Henry St* builds on the previously discussed failings of the work *Composition with Capsicum*, in that the objects used contribute to the artwork's content through a relation to the site. In short, I identify the use of objectification as successful when the materials used have a relevance or relation to the locale of the work.

For the early works made as part of *Actions/AC4CA*, my engagement with the site of each AC4CA wall painting was limited to the formal properties of the painting itself—its colours and composition as well as the physical and functional particularities of its location. At this stage the creative outcomes of *Actions/AC4CA* did not work to engage, reference or take into account other facets that constitute contemporary understandings of site. The following section outlines a progression from an appropriation of site as a physical location, to an understanding of site as a more complex and multilayered set of discursive factors.

### **From across the city**

In its formative stages, the project *Actions/AC4CA* was driven by an attempt to situate the seemingly autonomous AC4CA wall paintings within their locations, by emphasising, incorporating and illuminating the conditions specific to the site. For

the previously analysed artworks, my engagement and understanding with site was limited to the immediate, physical surroundings of the AC4CA wall paintings. Through an understanding of Kwon's notion of the 'discursive site', and in line with contemporary situated practices that engage the conditions of locale beyond the physical, my engagement with the sites of the AC4CA wall paintings expanded to include the sociopolitical, historical and cultural conditions of each wall paintings locale, as well as its physical location within the city of Fremantle. This is evidenced by the artwork titled *From across the city* (2012) made in response to *AC4CA Project 7*.

*From across the city* is a series of photographs taken in places around the city of Fremantle where the Queensgate car park is visible in the distance. What results is a number of juxtapositions, with each photograph portraying *AC4CA Project 7* in relation to various socially, politically, historically and culturally significant landmarks and institutions. One of the photographs is taken from Monument Hill, a large grassed public reserve near the centre of the city (Figure 3.8). Monument Hill hosts the Fremantle War Memorial, a large obelisk dedicated to the fallen soldiers and sailors of World War I. The photograph taken at this location is of the view looking out over the city, including the artwork *AC4CA Project 7* amid the cityscape. Also included in the photograph is the Fremantle Maritime Museum, adjacent to the Port Authority building and the harbour's South Mole. Extruding from the city's urban sprawl are the cranes used at Fremantle's port—Victoria Quay, the Fremantle Town Hall and a large social housing apartment block. The image captures a nexus of interrelating aspects of Fremantle's maritime, colonial and wartime heritage, as well as its recent commercialisation as a tourist destination, within which the AC4CA painted Queensgate car park is inevitably intertwined. The image not only portrays the physical location of the car park as situated within the broader urban environment, but works to locate the AC4CA car park amid a broader cultural, historical and sociopolitical situation.

Whilst the photograph does not intend to suggest that there is a singular, specific or explicit sociopolitical oriented relationship between these heterogeneous landmarks, institutions and the AC4CA artwork, the image allows and facilitates various readings, connections and relationships between these things to occur via simple juxtaposition. Another photograph made as part of *From across the city*







Figure 3.8 David Attwood, *From across the city (Monument Hill)*, 2012, photograph.



Figure 3.9 David Attwood, *From across the city (Mark of the Century)*, 2012, photograph.

shows the car park in the distance, behind the high exterior walls of the Fremantle Prison, another shows it above the head of a footballer in Robert Hitchcock's statue *Mark of the Century* (2006) (Figure 3.9). Collectively, the twelve-image series *From across the city* facilitates a multiplicity of connections, relationships and readings involving the AC4CA artwork and various facets of its urban location. Whilst the precise nature of these readings remains unspecified and open to interpretation, emphasising the context of *AC4CA Project 7* both physically, socially, historically and politically is an attempt to refute Goddard's position that the wall paintings deny any readings beyond their own formal composition. Indeed, how does one engage an artwork that denies any meaning outside of itself, when it is very much intertwined with the complex social, political, and physical conditions of the public domain?

In February 2013, the photographic series *From across the city* was exhibited within Fremantle's Queensgate car park. Twelve photographs were installed on the walls of the car park on each level's entrance to the stairwell (Figure 3.10). Over a number of weeks, the photographs on display slowly diminished. As I periodically returned to the car park, it became evident that the works were being taken down and perhaps stolen by anonymous patrons. The reason for this is unknown; perhaps the patrons deemed the work too distasteful for display, or maybe they liked the work enough to remove it and take it home. I like to imagine that the photographs are now arranged sporadically throughout Fremantle's suburban sprawl, hanging on the walls of various living rooms and sitting areas. Whatever the case, one may speculate that the mysterious disappearance of the exhibited photographs (and their possible subsequent display somewhere else) might see the possible relationships forged between the AC4CA artwork and its surrounds extend indefinitely.

Different from the previously analysed works, *Composition with Capsicum*, *The coincidence* and *Black and White Henry St*, which took the immediate physical surrounds of various AC4CA wall paintings as their site, *From across the city* is centred on the social, political and historical conditions of the car park's surroundings as well as its physical location, and these discursive factors comprise the site being investigated. For *From across the city*, both the contents of the photographic images and the installation of the images within the car park worked



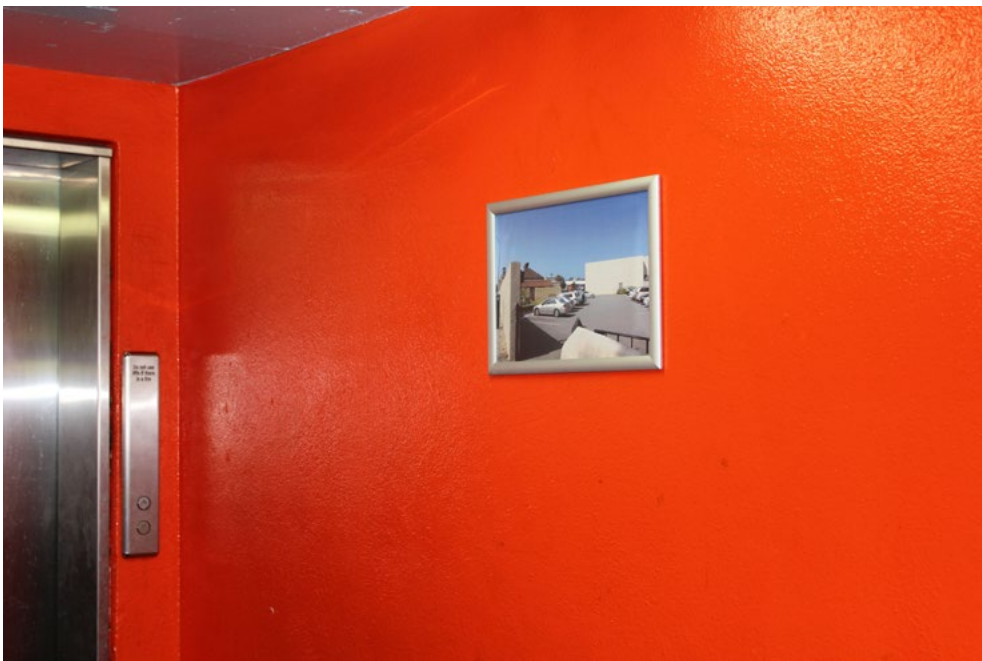


Figure 3.10 David Attwood, *From across the city*, 2013, installation.

to critique the artwork *AC4CA Project 7* and undermine the autonomy that seemingly informed its production. In encouraging various readings, connections and relationships involving the AC4CA painted car park and other culturally significant institutions and landmarks across Fremantle to emerge, *From across the city* problematises the position that *AC4CA Project 7* is an autonomous artwork functioning independently of “local contextual consideration” (Batchelor 1997, 67).

In this chapter I have analysed select outcomes made as part of a body of work titled *Actions/AC4CA*, in order to establish that this body of work was informed by a correlation made between the writings of Goddard, and Fried’s notion of the exemplary modernist artwork. Using this correlation, I created a series of artworks in response to the AC4CA’s Fremantle wall paintings in an attempt to debunk their supposed autonomy and the position that the content of these works function independently of the social, political and historical conditions of the public domain. The produced artworks would attempt to extend the AC4CA wall paintings out from the wall and into the street as a means to situate these artworks in relation to their sites. What I have referred to as ‘objectification’ emerged as a method during this process, where readymade materials and objects were appropriated and employed within a Non-Objective framework. I concluded that the use of this method is most successful when the functional and associative qualities of these objects have a correlation with the locale of the work—as a car has with a car park.

The photographic series *From across the city* was presented as conveying a more discursive understanding and engagement with site than earlier outcomes, and functioned to situate the work *AC4CA Project 7* amid Fremantle’s cityscape. The photographic series attempted to refute the notion of the autonomous artwork that functions independently of its surroundings by deliberately intertwining or juxtaposing the work *AC4CA Project 7* with various socially, politically, historically and culturally significant institutions and landmarks.

Redirecting my attention from the immediate physical locations of the AC4CA wall paintings to a larger, more discursive engagement with the city of Fremantle provided the impetus for a new body of work to emerge. Regular walks through the centre of the city from wall painting to wall painting soon evolved into more

meandering ventures to the outskirts of Fremantle; through the suburbs, along the coast and eventually to the port. The following chapter presents a body of work made in response to Fremantle's Victoria Quay, which I have used as a site to further investigate the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice.

# 4

## The political and the Non-Objective

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As part of this project's investigation into the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice, this chapter presents and analyses a body of artwork made in response to the city of Fremantle. The writings of Miwon Kwon and Claire Doherty are used to introduce the concept of 'wrong place', which I have appropriated and employed as a method for producing situated artworks. A correlation is established between the concept of 'wrong place' and philosopher Jacques Rancière's concept of political artwork, which is used to analyse a body of my artwork.

Predominantly, local artists working within the field of Non-Objective art produce artworks without reference to any sociopolitical context or referent, where the formal properties of the artwork alone constitute its content. This chapter presents an attempt to appropriate the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art in order to engage, provoke and agitate the sociopolitical conditions of a locale. Through an understanding of Rancière's political artwork, the concept of 'wrong place' and Non-Objective practice, this chapter presents a body of artwork that functions dialectically, and is at once situated *and* Non-Objective, formal and political.<sup>27</sup>

### The wrong place

Following a detailed historical account of site-specificity and public art, Kwon's book *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* ends with a chapter titled "By way of conclusion: One place after another". Here Kwon discusses the way that today's multi-centred and globalised community defined by exchange, movement and telecommunication has problematised the role of place in the formation of one's sense of self (2002, 157). Kwon presents nomadism as a

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27. Some of the ideas featured in Chapter Four were originally presented at the 4th Global Space and Place Conference held 3–5 September 2013 at Mansfield College, Oxford University, Oxford, in the paper "Fishing in the Wrong Place: Reconfiguring Place Through Situated Practice".



pervading aspect of contemporary life, where “the distinction between home and elsewhere, between “right” and “wrong” places, seems less and less relevant in the constitution of the self” (157). Kwon sets up a dichotomy between so called right and wrong places, where a right place is a place in which one feels comfortable, seamlessly assimilating into the environment through a sense of belonging. By contrast the wrong place induces a feeling of the unfamiliar, disorientation, and confusion. Where Kwon’s notion of ‘wrong place’ is used to describe the complex conditions by which one contemporaneously relates their identity to place, Doherty has appropriated the notion of the ‘wrong place’ to describe a particular aesthetic quality exemplified by situated artworks. For Doherty, effective situated artworks evoke a sense of the wrong place through a “displacement ... protest ... [or] intrusion” (2008, 9) that disrupts the normal way of things, raising questions and enabling their audiences to experience place anew (7).

In an article titled “Public Art as Situation: Towards an Aesthetics of Wrong Place in Contemporary Art Practice and Commissioning”, Doherty analyses some of the artworks presented in *Skulptur Projekte Münster 07*. In Doherty’s view, the most successful works are those which seemed to resist a nostalgic, commemorative or literal representation of the city, to instead appear intrusive and disjointed, “effecting a kind of sense of ‘being in the wrong place’, a sense of dislocation, or displacement” (Doherty 2008, 4). In being critical of those artists who attempted to embed themselves within the social fabric of the community in order to make work that belongs, Doherty instead proposes to embrace making work in the wrong place from the vantage point of an intruder, tourist, or nomad. Doherty writes,

If we understand place to be an unstable, shifting set of political social, economic and material relations—surely the works which connect and engage with a real sense of place will be those that engender a sense of dislocation—that enable the passer-by, the art pilgrim, the participant to see the city, place anew? (2008, 7)

Whilst Doherty appropriates Kwon’s notion of the wrong place as a quality belonging to situated artworks, I have used the notion of the wrong place as a method to produce situated Non-Objective artworks. It is from this position that

I have approached the production of a body of artwork in response to the city of Fremantle.

Taking the city of Fremantle as a site to investigate the production of situated Non-Objective artworks developed out of earlier interventionist responses to the Fremantle wall paintings of the AC4CA. As detailed in Chapter Three, attempts to extend the wall paintings into their surrounds and refute their supposed autonomy were based on analysing, interpreting and responding to their sites. The interventions made in response to the site of an AC4CA wall painting were initially based on the painting's immediate physical surroundings, and over time developed into a broader consideration of other social, political and historical conditions. This process led me to research the history of Fremantle as a port city and its redevelopment into a tourist destination following Australia II's win of the America's Cup in 1983, and the preparation to host the America's Cup defence in 1987. Whilst a detailed analysis of the development of the city of Fremantle over time is beyond the scope of this project, the following section outlines some of the recent changes to Fremantle's port areas, and is presented as a contextual framework for a body of my artwork.

### **Fremantle**

Fremantle is a port city on Australia's west coast. Colonised in 1829 by Captain Charles Fremantle, the settlement was intended to provide a gateway to "the western part of the vast Australian continent" (Tull 2012, 124). This intention would eventually come to fruition in 1897 through the building of the Fremantle Harbour. For the majority of the twentieth century, Fremantle was distinguished by the colourful, cosmopolitan characteristics of a port city, however by the turn of the century—this was all a "lost world" (141). To accommodate for changes in the port industry, new shipping areas were built at external sites, drawing activity away from Fremantle's port and diluting both the social and physical presence of port activity within the city. Today this dilution is reflected in a shift in the city's demographic; once a town occupied by blue-collar dockworkers, fishermen and European immigrants, Fremantle has become a trendy, upmarket and largely gentrified recreational centre. An area of Fremantle that I recognise as exemplifying the recent gentrification of the city is Victoria Quay.

Connecting Fremantle's port to the city, Victoria Quay was once central to Fremantle's port industry, a bustling hub of cargo sheds and dockworkers. Over time the development of cargo handling facilities in other areas of the port has left Victoria Quay empty and largely unused. In 2000, plans were revealed by the Fremantle Waterfront to redevelop Victoria Quay into a commercial precinct that would rejuvenate the so-called "under-utilised" wharf (Fremantle Ports 2000, i). Today elements of the Fremantle Waterfront Masterplan now in place include the Maritime Museum, of which the adjacent A Sheds (formerly used for cargo handling) now host the museum's administrative office spaces. The plans have also seen the refurbishment of the wharf's B sheds to house a ferry terminal and the Tasty Express café, with another nearby commercial precinct planned. What was once a working port has become a commercialised tourist destination. I identify the recent gentrification of Victoria Quay as functioning as a microcosm of Fremantle at large, exemplifying the shifts in the city's demographic and identity.<sup>28</sup>

In her essay *Places and Their Pasts*, writer Doreen Massey posits that places are made up of social relationships to the beyond, to the global, "and these global relationships as much as the internal relationships of an area will influence its character, its 'identity'" (2005, 186). Hence, for Massey "places are always already a hybrid" (183) and so "the identity of a place is thus not to be seen as inevitably to be destroyed by new importations" (186). Whilst acknowledging that a place's identity is continually becoming, Massey explains that this does not "mean that no distinctions can be made, no judgements or political stances taken, on what might be the interpretation of the past or the most preferred directions for the future" (186). In line with Massey's assessment, I acknowledge that whilst the identity of a place such as Fremantle is not necessarily destroyed by 'the new', by importation, and by extension the redevelopment of its public spaces, I have nevertheless taken a critical stance to the recent gentrification of Victoria Quay, and have used this stance to inform the production of a body of artwork. As part

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28. I acknowledge the traditional landowners of what is now referred to as Fremantle, and this body of work takes the recent gentrification of Victoria Quay as its impetus whilst being aware that the site's former use as a functional port was already an industrialisation of the original site.

of this project, Victoria Quay has been used as the site for a body of artwork that attempts to function as an anti-monument<sup>29</sup> to the wharf's redevelopment, generating questions as to the sociopolitical implications of a boutique port for the city of Fremantle. Employing Doherty's notion of the wrong place as a method, in conjunction with the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art, the work investigates the potential for Non-Objective practice to function dialectically with notions of the political, through the production of a body of situated Non-Objective artworks.

The artwork *Fishing* (2013) was made as part of this body of work, taking the form of an action that I performed on the wharf of Fremantle's Victoria Quay (Figure 4.1). The action involved me fishing from the wharf with a bright pink fishing rod as container ships and yachts moved through the harbour and on-looking pedestrians walked by. It was my intention for the artwork to use the activity of fishing as an agent to agitate the described recent gentrification of Victoria Quay. Fremantle was Western Australia's first fishing port and in the early stages of Fremantle's development occupied a pivotal position in the shaping of the city's identity. In her essay "The Multicultural, Social And Economic Contribution of Fremantle's Fishing Industry 1829–1960s", writer Sally Rita May credits the fishing industry as attracting European immigrants to the colony, who during the early stages of settlement "made a major contribution to Fremantle's social, political and economic history and heritage" (2012, 150). The fishing industry would also shape Fremantle in a physical, architectural sense, exemplified by the Fisherman's Jetty—the site of Fremantle's first fishing market (which today is largely non-existent with the exception of a few remains visible from Bathers Beach) and the Fishing Boat Harbour (now a commercial marina boasting over a dozen 'award winning' cafes, bars and restaurants, a brewery, high speed jet boat rides and chartered sailing tours amongst other entertainment (Fremantle Fishing Boat Harbour 2013)). As an activity, practice and industry once central to the community and identity of Fremantle, today fishing might be thought of as marginal in relation to the commercial redevelopment of the city, and is largely

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29. Writer Jacques Perron describes the anti-monument as "an action, a performance, which clearly rejects the notion of a monument developed from an elitist point of view as an emblem of power" (Perron 2003, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer).



Figure 4.1 David Attwood, *Fishing*, 2013, photographic documentation of an action.

absent from its public spaces. The work *Fishing* sees the site of Victoria Quay, a formerly functional port turned commercial precinct used as a site to continue to fish.

My understanding of Doherty's notion of the wrong place was used to create the artwork *Fishing*—it was my intention for various aspects of the work to appear incongruous with the surroundings. The work plays on the visual juxtaposition of the typically passive and solitary activity of recreational fishing with the industrialisation of port activity seen across the harbour—a contrast that at least initially sees the act of fishing as out of place. As I fished from the wharf, people walking by (tourists?) occasionally stopped to look; ice-creams in hands and cameras around necks. I intended for the act of fishing to be punctuated by the use of a bright pink fishing rod, for the rod to appear confusing and disjointed, as if in the wrong place. In achieving a kind of visual intrusion, the activity of fishing would be amplified, the disruptive pink rod problematising the relationship between the act of fishing, and the context of Victoria Quay. It is this state of confusion and incongruity, this being in the wrong place, that I suggest 'reconfigures' the place of Victoria Quay, allowing ways to re-imagine, re-interpret and re-visualise this situation.

### **The political**

In elaborating on the idea of reconfiguration, the ways that the artwork *Fishing* works to reconfigure Victoria Quay, and the potential for Non-Objective practice to engage the political, I will firstly refer to an artwork by Francis Alÿs. In a 2004 artwork titled *The Green Line (Sometimes doing something poetic can become political, and sometimes doing something political can become poetic)*, Alÿs made a hole in the bottom of a tin of green paint and then walked through the city of Jerusalem, "trailing a line of green paint behind him" (Godfrey 2010, 22). The green line was made in reference to the "green line drawn by Moshe Dayan on a map at the ceasefire of the 1948 conflict between Israel and Jordan" (22), representing a persistent theme throughout Alÿs' oeuvre—the inherent violence of borders and the segregation of communities. In reference to *The Green Line*, writer Mark Godfrey proposes,

We might emphasise the impermanence of Alÿs' line, which will disappear as people walk over it. With this in mind, perhaps the action gestured towards a borderless Jerusalem, where all lines might be similarly erased, and its people share its space. (2010, 24)

By suggesting a borderless Jerusalem, Alÿs' action poetically engages the local politics of the city's borders and societal structures.

In the subsequent exhibition of Alÿs' work *The Green Line*, the artist "prominently" displayed the work's title alongside the video documentation of the action (Godfrey 2010, 24). Godfrey analyses the implications of the title statement: "Sometimes doing something poetic can become political, and sometimes doing something political can become poetic", and suggests that,

If Alÿs were ... to claim this work as a 'political' act, it might be expected to have made an impact on the actual negotiations around territory and rights in Jerusalem. ... Surely to make an identifiable and measurable impact, a work needs to ... advocate a specific goal. (24)

According to Godfrey, what retrieves Alÿs' work "from the criticism of poetic ineffectuality" (24) is a particular notion of politics put forward by French philosopher Jacques Rancière. Godfrey explains that for Rancière, politics takes place whenever there is contestation over the matter of who has a voice or visibility, over how something is visible, and therefore political acts are those that achieve a "reconfiguration of the given perceptual forms" (Rancière 2006, 63).

In his book *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Rancière presents a theory of politicised art based on what he terms "the distribution of the sensible" (2006, 63). For Rancière the politicised artwork "defines itself by a certain recasting of the distribution of the sensible" (63) and by this, he means that a politicised artwork reconfigures the self-evident perceptual facts of a situation to present the situation in a new way. Rancière explains that this is achieved by means of a rupture, whereby

the dream of a suitable political work of art is in fact the dream of disrupting the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable without having to use the terms of a message as a vehicle. It is the dream of an art that would transmit meanings in the form of a rupture with the very logic of meaningful situations. (2006, 63)

Resonating with what Doherty attributes as the positive effects of artworks made in the wrong place, that is the disorienting, the confusing and the displaced, Rancière describes the rupturing of “the given perceptual forms” (63) necessary for political art as a product of that which is uncanny, shocking and illogical.

Suitable political art would ensure, at one and the same time, the production of a double effect: the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification. (63)

In deliberately resisting interpretation in order to disrupt that which is ordinarily perceivable, the political artwork achieves “a reconfiguration of the given perceptual forms” (63).

Applying the terms outlined by Rancière to the work *Fishing* demonstrates my intention for the aesthetic qualities of the wrong place to evoke a reconfiguration of place. In interpreting the given perceptual forms as the port’s redevelopment and gentrification, its cultural and historical value as a site of heritage and its physical attributes, the situated-act of fishing from the wharf at Victoria Quay might achieve a political status by means of a rupturing of these factors. I perceive the act of fishing from the wharf at Victoria Quay as being incongruous with the adjacent café, markets and alfresco terrace, where the gentrification of the site has polarised an activity that was once familiar. Marked by an additionally incongruous bright pink fishing rod, the artwork *Fishing* functions to disrupt these factors through that which does not belong. In aligning Alÿs’ work *The Green Line* with Rancière’s notion of the political, Godfrey suggests that the artist’s action of trailing a line of green paint through the city “disrupts existing ways of visualising or understanding the situation, and creates new ways of making it visible” (2010, 25). I intended for the act of fishing from Victoria Quay to take on a similar



function, in creating new ways of visualising the redevelopment of the wharf—of ‘understanding the situation’. It is evident that Rancière’s notion of the political artwork shares a similar sentiment with Doherty’s use of the wrong place—both are achieved through a disruption of that which is ordinarily self-evident, that which belongs. It follows that in investigating the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice, if the concepts of wrong place and ‘the distribution of the sensible’ can be used in interpreting the artwork *Fishing* as a politicised situated artwork, how might the work in turn be understood in Non-Objective terms?

### **Fishing with a pink line**

The use of the pink fishing rod within *Fishing* is an appropriation of objectification, a method introduced in Chapter Three as employed by a select group of local practitioners to produce Non-Objective artworks. To reiterate, I use the term objectification to describe a method for incorporating readymade materials and objects in the production of Non-Objective artworks. These materials are objectified, reduced to their purely formal qualities (colour, shape, form, and so on), through their appropriation as compositional elements. Colour is typically a quality foregrounded in the process of objectification, where the arrangement of coloured objects operates like a hard-edged abstract painting, with the objects assuming the form of compositional elements.<sup>30</sup> In the works of a number of local Non-Objective artists, foregrounding the colour of an object and emphasising colour relationships between objects is used as way to reduce these objects to formal, compositional elements, and in part dilute their functional and connotative properties.

When I discovered the Sport Fisher Junior 6’ Spinner fishing rod at the far end of an aisle in the fishing section of Kmart, the object seemed to somehow stand out from its surroundings, its contours and angles sharply defined and delineated, to a point where it’s overall opaqueness and lucidity meant that it was almost at once a pink fishing rod, and a *pink line*. The bright pink asserts the fishing rod’s objecthood, as if for a moment it were a pink line in space, whilst its recognisability as a

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30. Trevor Richard’s work *ASK* exemplifies the way that the method of objectification is used to emphasise the colours of readymade objects. See Figure 3.1.

fishing rod carries with it a distinct set of connotative readings and associations. In using the pink fishing rod as part of the artwork *Fishing*, I intended for the rod to function dialectically, as both an object of distinct formal properties akin to a painted pink line, and an object of culturally significant associative qualities that would agitate the current sociopolitical conditions of a situation; the recent gentrification of Victoria Quay.

In using the object to fish, in a situation where fishing has become out of place, I was attempting to employ the method of objectification in conjunction with contextual reference. Unlike the works of artists described in Chapter Three as employing objectification to produce Non-Objective artworks for gallery display, the artwork *Fishing* would utilise objectification to produce a situated artwork, an in-situ site-specific action. In this context, the significance of the object is amplified as per the aforementioned maritime history of Fremantle and what might be considered as its recent dissolution as a port city,<sup>31</sup> within which the fishing rod as an object could be said to occupy an outmoded and tenuous position.

### **There's no fish here**

In conjunction with the action *Fishing*, I also produced a series of photo-paintings<sup>32</sup> that would attempt to foreground and emphasise the formal properties of the pink fishing rod. I took a series of photographs of places around Victoria Quay that I thought reflected the wharf's gentrification, including the entrance to the

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31. In his essay "Fremantle: From Commercial Port to Recreational Centre?" writer Malcolm Tull quotes Professor Frank Broeze as stating "the port city as a social phenomenon has largely ceased to exist: despite the huge space taken up by harbours and ancillary installations, Australia's port cities have in fact become general cities that also happen to contain ports" (Broeze 1998, quoted in Tull 2012, 141–142). Fremantle is reflective of what Broeze describes as the dissolution of the port city—it is quite possible to walk down the Cappuccino Strip or through the Fremantle Markets unaware of the city's now physically and socially distant port.

32. Photopainting is a term used by Australian artist David Thomas to describe his works that involve the application of paint on top of printed photographs. Thomas uses the photopainting as means of addressing notions of time, memory and duration.



Figure 4.2 David Attwood, *There's no fish here (Town Hall)*, 2013, photograph.

Maritime Museum, the alfresco terrace of the E-Shed Markets and the front of the Tasty Express Café amongst others. I printed the photographs and then worked over the top of the prints with paint to create pink lines that would obscure the image. I intended for these painted pink lines to visually disrupt the image, in a similar way that I had intended for the act of fishing to operate as a disruption or a rupture of the wharf-turned-commercial precinct. These photo-paintings soon became intermediate works between the initial action *Fishing* and another situated artwork; I decided that instead of painting a pink line over the top of a printed image, the line would be created or installed in situ, so that the line would become part of the situation. With the pink fishing rod in hand, I returned to Victoria Quay. This time the fishing rod was held up in front of the camera, so that it obscured the shot. Holding the rod in my left hand and the camera in my right, the resulting photograph featured a bright pink line running vertically through the centre, bisecting the image. By using the photographic frame to truncate the fishing rod, the details and features of the object (the ringlets, line, reel, handle) are precluded and the fishing rod is reduced to a Non-Objective pink line (Figure 4.2).

In analysing the photographic series developed from this process, I firstly refer to an artwork by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. Begun in 1995 Ai's *Study for Perspective* (1995–2003) is an ongoing photographic series that features the artist extending his left arm into the picture frame and giving the middle finger to various iconic

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Figure 4.3 Ai Weiwei. *Study for Perspective* (1995–2005), photographs.



Figure 4.4 (Left) David Attwood, *There's no fish here (Notre Dame)*, 2013, photograph.  
(Right) David Attwood, *There's no fish here (Bathers Beach)*, 2013, photograph.



institutions and so-called “seats of power from around the world” (Tinari 2012, 73). The first *Study for Perspective* was made in response to Tiananmen Square in 1995, and the ongoing series has since expanded to include the White House, the Reichstag and various other national parliaments (Figure 4.3). Whilst initially *Study for Perspective* appears to be a crude and even childish contempt for figures of governmental authority, Ai’s gesture becomes more complex over time; the series periodically moves from iconic institutions of government to religious monuments (San Marco in Venice, Valle de los Caidos in Madrid), to cultural institutions (The Tate Modern, the Sydney Opera House), to natural landscapes (in China and Italy), and even to the artist’s own work (*Fountain of Light*, Left-Right-Studios, Beijing). The series evolves from a straightforward or “empty attempt to fly in the face of perceived authority” to a more complex and convoluted articulation of “subject position” (Tinari 2012, 73).

Whilst acknowledging that Ai’s *Study for Perspective* is an artwork made within a multifaceted artistic practice with complex political interests that lay beyond the scope of this research project, this artwork nevertheless provided a point of departure for my artwork. Following Ai’s *Study for Perspective* and in particular the way that the series has become more complex over time through a diversity of settings, the gesture that I had created involving the fishing rod was extended beyond Victoria Quay to include other parts of Fremantle. The pink line was used in response to various iconic urban spaces (Market Street, Fremantle Town Hall, Fishing Boat Harbour), cultural institutions and artworks (Fremantle Arts Centre, University of Notre Dame, AC4CA wall paintings) and other natural locations (Bathers Beach) amongst others (Figure 4.4). It was my intention for this extension to facilitate readings pertaining to Fremantle at large, as opposed to Victoria Quay specifically. Unlike *Study for Perspective*, where Ai’s gesture is afforded a universal significance, an overt and explicit symbol of irreverence and contempt, the gesture featured in my work, which I have titled *There’s no fish here* (2013) is not afforded the equivalent signification. Instead the Non-Objective pink line is silent and self-referential, quietly bisecting images of the Fremantle Prison, the Fremantle Arts Centre, and the Fishing Boat Harbour amongst other institutions and landmarks. It is only through a relationship to the parallel work *Fishing*, that the Non-Objective pink line becomes connotative of a fishing rod, and intends to elicit a series of provocative readings involving Fremantle and the practice of fishing, an activity once central to the city’s identity.

In an essay titled "Fingered with a Camera: Ai Weiwei and Photography", Philip Tinari describes *Study for Perspective* as speaking "more through juxtaposition than through composition. ... They work less as empty protests than as early articulations of a philosophy of resistance" (2012, 73). The use of the pink line in my photographic series intends to operate in a similar way, where the dual function of the pink line as a fishing rod works to juxtapose a political, cultural, or historical institution, landscape, artwork or urban environment. As in Ai's somewhat ambiguously made middle-finger gesture to a Tuscan landscape, there is not one clear message embodied by such juxtaposition, but a field of possible messages, meanings and questions. What does it mean to hold up a fishing rod to obscure the view of the Fremantle Town Hall? If traditionally a town hall represents a meeting place, the symbolic centre of a community, than perhaps this gesture asks what is the significance of fishing to the community here, its sense of place, the contemporary way of things? These are the questions that the work intends to generate, without offering a possible answer or resolution.<sup>33</sup>

### **A blurring**

The pink line that consistently bisects the images that make up the series *There's no fish here* is neither consistently in or out of focus. From picture to picture the line oscillates from being a sharply defined cylindrical pink form—to a blurry pink rectangular haze. Light also contributes to the inconsistency of the pink line, at times the line appears in shadow, at times in full sunlight; at times the direction of light emphasises the lines cylindrical qualities and at times it is reduced to a two dimensional plane. Ultimately these qualities are not predetermined or deliberately executed; rather they are the result of the provisional circumstances that belong

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33. Writer Yukie Kamiya (2013, 109) describes the actions of Alÿs as "seeking a way into discussion rather than providing a solution." I align the work *There's no fish here* with this approach, as a series designed to generate a multiplicity of questions involving the sociopolitical significance of fishing to present day Fremantle, as opposed to embodying a clear, singular position. Alÿs himself asks, "Can an artistic intervention truly bring about an unforeseen way of thinking, or is it more a matter of creating a sensation of "meaningless" that shows the absurdity of the situation?" (Alÿs 2007, quoted in Godfrey 2010, 25).



to each situation. It is precisely these inconsistencies that work to *situate* the pink line; the weather, lighting and fault of the hand could all be circumvented by painting a pink line on top of a printed photograph, but in deliberately choosing to photograph an in-situ pink stripe as opposed to a painted pink stripe, what becomes a Non-Objective compositional element is situated, tangled with the conditions of locale.

A selection of the photographs featured in *There's no fish here* were taken in Fremantle's historical West End, which until the middle of the twentieth century was the heart of Fremantle's working port (Tull 2012, 143). May discusses the early stages of Fremantle's domestic fishing market, and uses an extract from the *Perth Gazette* to paint a picture of Fremantle in the 1890s: "Fremantle has been converted to a regular fishing station and the roofs of many of the houses are covered with fish, for the purpose of drying them sufficiently for export" (Perth Gazette 1836, quoted in May 2012, 158). The image evoked by this extract exists in stark contrast with contemporary Fremantle and particularly the former residential areas of the West End. Today the West End is a largely privatised area, with many of the warehouses having been converted into houses for middle class professionals, renovated as shops and offices for private businesses, or have "been absorbed into the campus of the privately owned University of Notre Dame" (Tull 2012, 143). It was whilst I was attempting to take a photograph of the University's main entrance that a man walked past and said "There's no fish here mate". I looked up from the camera to see the man smirking, before turning his head to continue walking. Whilst I assumed that the gentleman was making a light-hearted and good spirited remark about the fact that I looked lost standing in the middle off the road with a fishing rod, his comment was in fact poignantly accurate; there are no fish here, there is no fishing here, there are shops and cafés and university courtyards and private car parks but there are no fish, and there is no fishing.

In both the previously discussed series *Study for perspective* by Ai, and in the work *There's no fish here*, there is a pervasive and underlying personal quality. These are not disembodied, automated or clinically taken photographs (in fact Ai's work literally captures the photographers hand in the image); they are the

subjective recordings of a personal and individual position.<sup>34</sup> When seen in relation to each other, the subjective nature of *There's no fish here* shapes the reading of the action *Fishing*. The act of fishing becomes a personal act of resistance, an individual gesture made as an expression of a point of view. A correlation emerges between the two works and this is evident in their titles; one is an assertion that 'there's no fish here', the other is almost like a reply through a verb, an action made in spite of the assertion—I will continue to fish, I am fishing.

The elicitation of possible readings of an artwork through another is a strategy that has emerged from the creation of *There's no fish here* and its correlation with the work *Fishing*. The works are tied together by the pink fishing rod, where the rod is used as both a functional object, and a formal, compositional Non-Objective element. Collectively, the body of work presents fishing at Victoria Quay as an anti-monument to the gentrification of the wharf, a political action pursued through the appropriation of a Non-Objective pink line.

Upon reflecting on the artworks *Fishing* and *There's no fish here*, I view my use of the pink fishing rod within these artworks as problematic. The fact that the rod is pink as opposed to any other colour is in fact, arbitrary. Whilst another more muted or duller colour may not have been as visually prominent, the *pinkness* of the fishing rod plays no role in the conceptual formation of the work. In the previously analysed work *ASK* by Trevor Richards, the specific blue, yellow, orange and green objects collected by the Kellerberrin public and displayed within the IASKA gallery space were selected due to a deliberate parameter set by the artist. These colours had no explicit relationship with the place itself, to the locale of Kellerberrin, but instead simply functioned to continue an aspect of the artist's oeuvre. The same can be said for the use of specific colours within the practices of many other local Non-Objective artists, where particular colours over time become stylistic signatures.<sup>35</sup> This tendency includes the Fremantle wall paintings

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34. Here the term position has a dual function, it is used to describe both the literal location of the photographer in space, and also a personal point of view or attitude towards a situation, topic or issue.

35. Perth-based artist Jurek Wybraniec's ongoing use of a specific pale pink, yellow and blue

produced by the AC4CA, which feature colours that hold no relation to the locale in which the paintings are situated, and generally have no signification beyond the work itself. Whilst this approach to colour *as colour* is consistent with the self-referential ideology of Non-Objective art, it is an area of Non-Objective practice that I identify as offering up potential for more situated approaches and outcomes. I question how colour might function dialectically, as both a formal compositional element, *and* a signifier for other things—the social, the political and the historical conditions of locale.

Fremantle is the home of the Fremantle Dockers Football Club, one of two Western Australian football clubs that compete in the Australian Football League. In 2003, after the AC4CA had painted the multi-storey Queensgate car park in bright yellow, blue and orange, some members of the local Fremantle community were dismayed that the large car park had been adorned in the blue and yellow of rival club the West Coast Eagles. Whilst it is presumed that the AC4CA did not intentionally use these colours to elicit these readings<sup>36</sup> (as to do so would be contrary to the self-referential ethos of Concrete art) the reception of the work within the community is one example of how colour might be deliberately used within a Non-Objective framework to reference, agitate, provoke, and disrupt the conditions of locale.

In assessing *Fishing* and *There's no fish here*, I question whether the arbitrary nature of the pink fishing rod makes these artworks less successful as situated Non-Objective artworks. Does the arbitrary nature of the fishing rod's *pinkness* mean that these artworks are no more situated than the wall paintings of the AC4CA? Or alternatively, does the fact that the colour pink in this context has no clear relation to locale more firmly locate this aspect of the work within the Non-Objective? Where the act of fishing is situated and made in reference to the

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as well as Melbourne-based artist John Nixon's repeated use of a signature orange and silver are two examples among many local Non-Objective artists that evidence this tendency.

36. In an article by Stephen Bevis, Goddard is quoted as saying "some people did get upset when the big car park in Fremantle was naively painted in the colours of the West Coast Eagles. That went down like a bomb" (Goddard, quoted in Bevis 2010).

sociopolitical and historical conditions of Victoria Quay as a locale, the pink line is by contrast without referent or signification—it is Non-Objective; the work then contains elements of both the situated and the Non-Objective. Nevertheless, I identify that these artworks would have been more successful as situated Non-Objective artworks had the colour of the fishing rod been in some way more pertinent, relevant or significant to the conditions of locale. In the following chapter, I analyse a body of my artwork that approaches the use of colour as both Non-Objective and situated.

I identify this body of artwork made in response to the city of Fremantle as functioning dialectically, in simultaneously appropriating the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art through the objectification of a pink fishing rod, as well as utilising methods identified as central to the discourse of situated practice, where the sociopolitical conditions of the location inform the work's content. Punctuating this dialectical relationship is the notion of the wrong place, which I used in the work to agitate, provoke and disrupt. Given the recent shifts in the social, political, and physical factors that define Fremantle as a place, I posit that what the city needs is not an(other) artwork that commemorates its cultural, colonial and maritime heritage, but one that may reconfigure the city by being in the wrong place. In accordance with Doherty, I recognise that artworks that reflect a sense of the wrong place present a more topical engagement with place than those which passively embed themselves within the city as if part of the scenery. Doherty suggests,

The experience of art is not one ... that necessarily *restores a sense of belonging* or offers up a moment of resolution, but if truly place responsive, situation-specific ... art will shatter the fictions of a stable sense of place, will intervene in the status quo and ... shift the ground beneath your feet. (2008, 11)

Unlike the wall paintings of the AC4CA that according to Goddard (2011, n.p.) operate without any prescribed meaning and deny "any direct political, social or moral position", the works *Fishing* and *There's no fish here* attempt to directly engage the political and social conditions that pervade Victoria Quay and wider Fremantle through "a reconfiguration of the given perceptual forms" (Ranci re

2006, 63). The body of artwork presented in this chapter evidences the potential for the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art to engage the political by adopting a situated approach to locale and operates within a dialectical space between the Non-Objective and the situated, or what I understand to be a situated Non-Objective practice.

The following chapter examines notions of the local, and regional folklore and investigates the potential for Non-Objective art practice to engage the conditions of locale through these concepts. Drawing on Sydney's inner-west region as a site, the following chapter presents a body of artwork that negotiates a dialectical space between Non-Objective art practice and regional folklore.

In Chapter One I outlined a critique of the gallery Sydney Non Objective (SNO) that was based on the position that the exhibitions held at SNO generally preclude an engagement with the locale of the gallery space through the presentation of autonomous artworks. Following this critique, an opportunity to investigate the potential for Non-Objective practice to engage the conditions of locale was identified. This chapter presents a body of work made in response to the locale of the SNO gallery. Writer Lucy Lippard's book *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* is used to analyse this body of artwork in terms of its relationship to notions of locale and regional folklore. Various concepts emerge out of this analysis, such as the potential for a readymade situated Non-Objective artwork, as well as the Non-Objective Mural, which I present as operating dialectically in a space between the Non-Objective and the situated.

In this chapter I also analyse the use of dissemination as a method for producing situated Non-Objective artworks. The practices of Leni Hoffmann and Francis Alÿs are analysed with regards to the dissemination of their artworks amongst a general public in the form of images, captions, flyers, and video amongst other forms. Alÿs' writings on 'the fable' are used to frame understandings of the effect of the disseminated artwork on a public audience and the potential for artwork to take on the form of a story or urban legend that "survives the event itself" (Alÿs 2002, quoted in Godfrey 2010, 15). In investigating the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice and as a counter to the production of autonomous artworks for gallery display, I have used dissemination as a method to extend Non-Objective outcomes into the public domain, beyond the interior spaces of the art gallery. Through the analysis of a body of artwork made in response to the locale of SNO, this chapter presents various attempts to engage, appropriate, incorporate and illuminate the regional<sup>37</sup> folklore of a locale through a Non-Objective framework.

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37. In *The Lure of the Local* Lippard (1997, 34) explains that a 'region' was originally used as an objective assessment or description of a geographically designated area and that

## The inner-west

In *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, Lippard (1997, 5) explains, "I know I have been lured to the subject of the local by its absence or rather by the absence of value attached to specific place in contemporary cultural life, in the 'art world' and in Postmodern paradoxes and paradigms." Whilst Lippard's comments on the role or value of 'the local' as a subject within contemporary art discourse (and beyond) were made nearly two decades ago, they nevertheless resonate with my critique of the discourse of local Non-Objective art practice, and in particular a preclusion of locale evidenced by the exhibition program of gallery Sydney Non Objective. In summarising a critique of SNO and the works shown therein presented in Chapter One, the exhibitions held at SNO generally preclude any contextual reference to locality, site, place and or locale of the gallery space through the presentation of autonomous artworks. Whilst I have described this tendency as a preclusion of locale, in actuality the exhibited works are not deliberately *avoiding* locale, rather this is simply not their concern; location, place, site and the local are not themes that currently contribute to the discourse of local Non-Objective practice. Whilst this is not necessarily a fault in this area of practice, it provides an opportunity to act on a gap in knowledge and to investigate the potential for Non-Objective practice to reflect, engage or incorporate 'the local' in the production of artwork.

In 2013 I took part in a studio residency at SNO gallery, where I created a body of artwork that would attempt to reflect the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective practice whilst simultaneously incorporating, appropriating and responding to the locale of the SNO gallery. SNO is located on Marrickville Road, in the suburb of Marrickville, which is part of a larger region referred to as Sydney's inner-west. The locale of the gallery space and the social, political and historical conditions of Marrickville were used as an impetus for a body of my situated artworks. Much of the work was informed by the writings of Lippard, and throughout this chapter

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over time the term has more subjectively come to describe a space "determined by stories, loyalties, group identity, common experiences and histories (often unrecorded), a state of mind rather than a place on a map." I align my use of the term regional with this sentiment.

*The Lure of the Local* will be used to contextualise and support various outcomes of the project.

The following extract has been taken from a series of notes I wrote in my journal during the studio residency at SNO gallery. It is presented here as preface to an analysis of SNO, as a way to 'paint the scene' and to locate both the gallery and the artwork's therein within a broader sociopolitical situation.

Running through the suburb is Marrickville Road, flanked by Vietnamese grocers, fast food joints, so called 'massage parlours', charity stores, semi-trendy coffee shops and TAB taverns with carpeted floors. Radiating out from Marrickville Road is a hodgepodge of privileged old terrace housing, overgrown state housing and pockets of light industry (mainly automotive, timber and other miscellaneous factories with roller doors and shelving units). There is a *hardness* to the area, a grittiness forged by dirty concrete, bitumen and wire fencing, cigarettes, milk crates and empty brown bottles that is at times camouflaged by the beginnings of gentrification. There remains an underlying 'working class' feel—this is the inner-west.

(Attwood 2013, unpublished notes)

Gathering research and information about the locale of the SNO gallery space initially involved a series of walks, starting at SNO and radiating out into the surroundings suburbs. The walks were designed to gain a feel for the place, to become a customised to its daily rituals, practices and occurrences, and to potentially stumble across something that might become the subject for a body of artwork. During one of these walks, I came across a T-intersection, where in the distance the intersecting road at first appeared to be a dead end, but on a second look, led to a kind of large gate, flanked by what looked like blue doors. When I reached and passed through the gate, I found myself standing at the top of an enormous grassed area with a central football field. From where I was standing at the highest point of the park, the field was in a kind of valley, sunken below the street level from where I had just come. The park was completely empty with the exception of a man running laps of the football field and a girl walking her dog. At the far end of the football field was a grandstand, and at the near end, the end





Figure 5.1 David Attwood, *Documentation of Henson Park*, 2013, photograph.

closest to me were rows of wooden seats that stretched around one half of the oval. The wooden seats had been painted in alternating blue and white, so that from afar, they appeared as if part of an enormous blue and white striped painting (Figure 5.1).

### **The Bluebags**

The field that I had discovered was in fact the historic Henson Park. A small plaque on the grandstand stated that the park was where the first official game of Rugby League was played in Australia, and today is the home ground of the Newtown Jets Rugby League Club. The Jets represent Sydney's inner-west district in the New South Wales Cup, and their home ground lies under the flight path to Sydney Airport. The introduction to writer Terry Williams' book *Out of the Blue: The History of Newtown RLFC* reads,

The Newtown District Rugby League Football Club ... [is] the oldest club in Australian rugby league. They were known as the "Bluebags" in their Royal Blue jerseys and white shorts. Many years later they became the "Jets" but Bluebags remains the popular title for old timers. (Daly 1993, 8)

The first chapter of Williams' book, titled *Face of the Nation*, provides a brief account of the formation of the club in a time of general hardship across Australia, and describes Newtown and the surrounding suburban district as "epitomising the changing face of Australia... There's something fundamentally Australian about the place. It's not easy to identify, but it's there in the architecture of the houses, in the pubs and, most importantly, in the lives of the people" (Williams 1993, 9).

Williams describes the Newtown district as historically "industrial and working class" and since 1908, the 'Bluebags' have been "a battling club representing a battlers district" (1993, 9). According to Williams, the formation of Rugby League in Australia—the so-called 'new code', was

essentially a working class movement and its initial strongholds were in blue collar areas. Newtown was the only landlocked club amongst

the pioneers, and whilst other suburbs have become trendy inner city areas the Bluebags district remains predominantly working class.  
(10)

In *Out of the Blue*, Williams constructs a mythology around the Newtown Jets where the club is said to be embedded within the social fabric of the area, existing as an integral and pervasive component of local identity.<sup>38</sup> A section of the Newtown Jets website titled *The Newtown Story* reflects a similar sentiment to Williams' book, in linking the Newtown Jets Rugby League Club with a blue collar, working class 'Aussie-battler' spirit and a dogged 'Australian-ness'. The page reads,

From the very beginning, Newtown became noted for its gritty, never-say-die spirit, and the ability to make the best of limited financial resources. Located in a rock solid working class district, Newtown was seen as the definitive battler's team, and one associated with the best fighting qualities inherent in the Australian character. (Newtown Jets 2014)

Walking down Marrickville Road towards SNO, the presence of the Bluebags is palpable; the front window of a barber displays a Newtown Jets supporters sign, as does a bank, stickers displaying the Jets logo can be seen on car windows, mail boxes and telegraph poles, posters displaying the Jets home games are proudly taped to the walls of TAB taverns, where punters can be seen in Jets hoodies. It is evident that the Newtown Jets occupy an important role within what might be described as Marrickville's locational identity, or to use Lippard's terminology —its sense of place. Paraphrasing the writing of Ken Rydne, Lippard describes a sense of place as a "specific genre of regional folklore", made up of four layers of meaning, including "local names for flora, fauna, and topography; handed-down history ... group identity and place-based individual identity; and the emotions or affective bonds attached to place" (Lippard 1997, 34). It is apparent that the

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38. The website Timeout.com indirectly supports Williams claim, listing Henson Park as a local attraction of the Marrickville area, and that "if you dwell in the inner west you're pretty much honour-bound to attend a home game by the Newtown Jets" (Timeout Sydney 2012).

Newtown Jets comprise a significant part of the community's regional folklore, as a series of practices, rituals, myths, legends, fables, colours, songs and sayings that have left their mark on the Marrickville area and constitute an important part of what it means to be in and from the inner-west. I was immediately drawn to this folklore, perhaps for its ironic, dramatic and humorous attributes —and perhaps also equally due to my affection for rugby league. During my time as a studio resident of the SNO gallery, I constructed a body of work in response to the Newtown Jets Rugby League Club, appropriating both the playing strip of the team as well as the regional folklore of the club as agents in the production of situated Non-Objective artworks. My aim for this body of artwork was to constitute an investigation into the potential for Non-Objective practice to function dialectically with the regional folklore of the public domain.

### **A readymade situated Non-Objective artwork**

In an interview with Samuel Wagstaff for *Artforum* in 1966, artist Tony Smith described the conditions of driving through a provisional urban landscape in New Brunswick, Canada, as inducing an experience transcendental of the experience of art, or somehow beyond what the artist had previously considered art to be.

When I was teaching at Cooper Union in the first year or two of the fifties, someone told me how I could get onto the New Jersey Turnpike. I took three students and drove them somewhere in the Meadows to New Brunswick. It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes and coloured lights. This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done. At first I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there which had not had any expression in art. The experience on the road was something mapped out but

not socially recognised. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most paintings look pretty pictorial after that. (Smith 1966, 2)

I liken Smith's experience of this urban landscape to my chance encounter with the Newtown Jets' Henson Park—an experience akin to the experiencing of art, and specifically Non-Objective art, but at the same time incomparable to any Non-Objective artwork I had seen. The experience that Henson Park provided—the repeated rows of extending planes of blue and white against the green of the surrounding lawn would work to deeply influence my understanding of Non-Objective art, its limitations, conventions and boundaries. Indeed, like Smith's dark landscape, Henson Park was similarly artificial, but lacked what Smith calls the "social recognition" (1966, 2) necessary for such a situation to attain the status of art. Still, there seemed to be a certain reality there, a collision or an assimilation of the formal with the situational on a scale that I propose has not yet had an expression in local Non-Objective practice.

In returning to Henson Park and the serial rows of wooden seats that had first captivated me, I wanted to respond to this site in a way that would implicate or frame the blue and white seats of the park in Non-Objective terms—I wanted to in some way suggest that Henson Park might be read, interpreted or experienced in terms of Non-Objective art. Initially, I thought that the blue and white seats might act as a motif for a series of Non-Objective paintings that could then be presented within the SNO gallery space. However I decided that to use the formation and colours of the seats in the production of a series of paintings would only constitute an inferior approximation of what already existed there at Henson Park. Instead I wished to suggest, deem or in some way regard Henson Park as a readymade situated Non-Objective artwork.

In *The Lure of the Local*, Lippard argues,

Some of the most interesting early attempts at place-specific art in the sixties reframed not-necessarily art practices or places by viewing them in terms of art ... The idea was to look at what was already in the world and transform it into art through the process of seeing,

naming and pointing out, rather than reproducing. This remains a valid methodology for making an art about place, since any place is there for the finding, an independent entity that does not need to be created so much as excavated or highlighted by the artist. (1997, 267)

In line with what Lippard describes as a methodology for making art about place, I decided that I would not use the seats of Henson Park to generate a series of paintings, but instead would simply document the seats and the park as they were. I returned to the park during a Newtown Jets home game, where the seats were occupied by local supporters adorned in the Jets royal blue, and photographically documented the occasion in an attempt to frame the event in Non-Objective terms. The photographs would provide a way of 'pointing out' and viewing the situation 'in terms of art', excavating or highlighting those aspects of the event that were reflective of or had attained some likeness to the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art. Particular attention was paid to the formal properties of the seats, their alternating white and blue pattern, and their linear, 'stripe-like' dimensions. In essence the photographs attempted to emphasise a correlation between the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art (as in the hard-edge, the uniformity of colour, the evasion of the painterly, the clarity of design) and the series of wooden seats at Henson Park, likening the seats to a hard-edged composition comprised of enclosed shapes of alternating blue and white.

The blue and white seats of Henson Park were deliberately documented whilst they were in use, while they were being activated by the public and by the event. In contrast to the documentation of the AC4CA wall paintings which despite their public setting are typically devoid of people, the aim of my documentation of Henson Park was to frame the seats of Henson Park as a readymade situated Non-Objective artwork, and hence position the Non-Objective work in direct relation to its local, social context as the home of the Newtown Jets (Figure 5.2). I presented my photographs on the walls of SNO alongside a map directing the gallery visitors to Henson Park, and fixtures that detailed the Jets home games.



Figure 5.2 David Attwood, *Henson Park*, 2013, photograph.



### **A Mural for the Newtown Jets**

The term 'mural' typically evokes notions of community art, figurative social commentary, urban street art and even political activism. Mural is not a term typically used within the vernacular of Non-Objective art; the preferred terms are wall painting, or wall piece. These terms are generally used to denote works made directly on the interior walls of the museum or gallery space, or may appear on a floor sheet or didactic panel as way to simply and pragmatically indicate that the work is made *on a wall*, as opposed to a canvas, board or otherwise. In reference to the AC4CA and their wall paintings made throughout Fremantle, it would seem that the group has taken this term and applied it to the urban, public domain, to spaces outside of the museum and gallery, to the spaces generally home to graffiti, stickers, stencils, paste-ups—and the mural. Why aren't the works of the AC4CA referred to as murals? Perhaps it could be the connotative qualities of the term that the AC4CA wishes to distance their works from, and 'wall painting' offers a more objective, less emotive, less sociopolitical oriented association.

In Chapter One, a critique of specific AC4CA wall paintings in Fremantle based on their relationship to their surrounds was prefaced by an acknowledgement that it was not the intention of the AC4CA to produce works that would resonate, assimilate, contest or otherwise engage with the social, political and or historical conditions of their site, and so it would be ineffective to assess or critique them in these terms. Nevertheless I established that a gap in knowledge exists between contemporary Non-Objective practices and more site-responsive, site-oriented practices and that an opportunity exists for a more situated Non-Objective practice to be investigated. Following this assertion, a number of questions emerged regarding the practice of the AC4CA and its relation to site: how might the AC4CA have responded to the sites that their works now occupy, and what might such a response look like? As a means to act on this gap in knowledge, and to potentially provide answers to the posed questions, I have investigated the notion of a Non-Objective Mural.

Located on Shepherd Street in a light industrial area of Marrickville, the work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets* was painted on the wall of the Aurora Biscuit Factory's carport (Figure 5.3). The mural reflects the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective





5.3 David Attwood, *A Mural for the Newtown Jets*, 2013, acrylic paint on wall, 5 x 7m.



art as detailed in Chapter One; the composition is hard-edged, reflects a lucidity of colour, a clarity of design, and the flat, even application of paint evades the painterly and eradicates any illusionary depth. Visually, the work could easily be recognised as an AC4CA wall painting, yet it differs in that the composition of the mural has referential, associative qualities. The blue of the mural is the royal blue of the Newtown Jets, and the three white stripes that stretch across its expanse reference the stripes on the sleeves of the Jets playing strip. In deliberate allusion to, or evocation of, the Newtown Jets Rugby League Club, the work is not solely self-referential, devoid of external referent or autonomous, and therefore not strictly Non-Objective.

It is precisely the associative and connotative qualities of the work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets* and the relevance of these associations to its locale that aligns the work with the discourse of situated practice. As detailed earlier in this chapter, the Newtown Jets comprise a part of the regional folklore of the Marrickville area, and attending a Jets home game at Henson Park is akin to a ritualistic communal practice. The location of the Shepherd Street wall is a short walk from Henson Park, and an even shorter walk to The Henson (formerly The Henson Park Hotel), a local pub that sponsors the Jets. The Henson is effectively a local institution,<sup>39</sup> the place to go for post-match discussion on a Sunday afternoon over a few beers. This is the social space that frames the work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets*, and what the artwork attempts to illuminate, reflect and engage.

In responding to the practice of the AC4CA, and in particular the group's assertion that their works remain in the realm of the purely visual and deny any "political, social or moral position" (Goddard, 2011, n.p.), I intended for the Non-Objective mural made as part of this project to have a topicality, relevance or pertinence to its locale. In other words it was important for the work to *not* be purely visual, but to instead be oriented towards the social and historical conditions of the place—to

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39. The website for The Henson boasts that the pub has "a rich and wonderful history with the folk of the inner-west" (The Henson 2014), and Broadsheet magazine describes the pub as a "long-standing institution and home of the Newtown Jets rugby club" (Vadnjal 2013, A New Local at the Henson).



its regional folklore. Whilst the work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets* was not made in consultation or collaboration with the local community, and so cannot be referred to as so-called community art, the work principally shares similarities with this discourse. Quoting writer Charles Frederick, Lippard explains that community art is rarely “simple political expression”, nor “simple caregiving”, but is instead “that which leaves ‘in place a new narrative for the community’ and creates ‘active self-critical subjects in history’” (Frederick n.d, quoted in Lippard 1997, 283). It is the ‘for the community’ quality that is central to community art, and is central to the work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets*. Unlike the practice of the AC4CA that takes a relatively passive stance to audience engagement, and whose works are said to require no response, but are simply there to be engaged by anyone who takes the time to notice them (Goddard 2004a, n.p.), my work was made specifically *for* a community, for the people who lived in the area and for the people that would see it everyday; it was made *for* the locals.

In 2010 the real estate prices in Marrickville were reported to have risen to unprecedented levels and were estimated to continue rising due to a “strong demand from the more affluent Sydney” (Nicholls and Chancellor 2010). In the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Stephen Nicholls and Jonathan Chancellor described Marrickville as “the new Paddington” (2010, Arise Marrickville)—a notoriously affluent eastern suburb of Sydney. Another article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2011 reported the rise of median house prices and the renovation of Federation homes as continuing the “gentrification of Marrickville” (Macken 2011, Marrickville; Sydney’s Inner West Hot Spot). Such reports differ from the inner-west suburbs portrayed in William’s *Out of the Blue* as inherently working class and proletariat, a place home to the ‘Aussie battler’. Whilst the work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets* does not intend to directly embody a singular meaning, message or position concerning what might be considered the recent gentrification of Marrickville, the situation affords the work a certain topicality and pertinence; as a local icon, what do the ‘Bluebags’ represent to the current community, given the recent changes in the area?

The concept of the Non-Objective Mural is inherently paradoxical; by definition, a Non-Objective mural would contain no discernable figuration and no signification beyond itself, and at the same time reflect a relevance, topicality or pertinence

to the community in which it exists. I identify the work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets* as functioning dialectically, as a work that embodies properties of both Non-Objective art and of situated practice. The work reflects the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art both in its clarity of design, and in its execution—the paint is applied flatly and evenly, the shapes are enclosed and hard-edged and the blue and white shapes ‘butt-up’ against each other, as opposed to being merged through a gradual transition. Where perhaps a more conventional Non-Objective wall painting would see the white stripes of the composition extend horizontally as three straight, parallel lines, the lines of my mural are ‘wavy’ and curved, like folds in fabric. It is through an allusion or reference to the playing strip of the Newtown Jets that the work forms a correlation with its locale. The work is thus situated, located beyond the confines of the gallery and museum and embedded within the public domain, where the conditions of this public environment inform the work’s content. The potential for the work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets* to contribute to the folklore of public experience through its dissemination amongst a general public is discussed in the following sections as a strategy for producing situated Non-Objective artworks.

### **Dissemination**

Both Hoffmann and Alÿs utilise dissemination in their practice as a method to re-present durational and site-oriented artworks to a public audience. I view the dissemination of an artwork to a public audience in the form of an image, video, caption, flyer or other format that may potentially contribute to the folklore of that public, as an effective strategy for producing situated artworks. Within this project, the term ‘public audience’ is used in line with Lippard’s (1997, 272) definition of the term, which implies “at the very least a larger-than-usual art audience and at most a culturally and socio-economically varied audience.”

In Chapter Two I defined situated artworks as those that occur within the public environment, and are in turn informed by the social, physical, political and historical conditions of these environments. In expanding on this understanding of the situated artwork, I identify the ability for an artwork to contribute to the dialogical dimension of place, in the form of disseminated information that may outlast the work itself, as equally as significant to the notion of a situated practice.

In other words, a series of posters displayed throughout a city may be just as effective as the installation of an object, or a performed action. Dissemination has been used in this project as a method to investigate the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice, and in the following sections the practices of Alÿs and Hoffmann will be analysed in an assessment of strategies for disseminating artwork to a public audience.

For Alÿs, the dissemination of information to a vast public is an integral part of his artistic practice. Writer Mark Godfrey describes a proliferation of material as perpetuating Alÿs' "long standing ambition to disseminate his work in as many ways as possible beyond the conventional distributional and display networks of the gallery museum" (2010, 15). Godfrey explains that Alÿs has frequently "offered free postcards and included DVDs in his books ... [and] he is also developing an open-access website of his works" (15), making a number of videos downloadable, which Alÿs considers to be "public domain works" (15). Godfrey (15) equates this distribution of material to a "democratisation of information—condensed and dispersed, the artwork can be accessed and used by a vast public."

What Godfrey describes as a democratisation of information extends to include Alÿs' paintings, which the artist uses to condense a project, situation or action into a single image. Alÿs explains, "figurative painting is still accessible to a wider public, and can be used as a means to limit (and hopefully sometimes bridge) the actual gap existing between a general public and a more elitist contemporary art scene, without denying or diminishing the eventual contemporaneity of the content" (Alÿs 2000, quoted in Biesenbach and Starke 2010, 38). Within his practice, the relevance of an artwork to a wider public and how the work might be used by this public is not supplementary or an additional aspect, but is ingrained into the fabric of the work itself, and informs the nature of its outcomes.

The notion of 'democratisation' is also used by various writers in reference to the practice of Hoffmann. Writers David Pistorius and Timothy Morrel both refer to the material qualities of plasticine as 'democratic', an "easily available material that has no specific association to the art context" (Morrel n.d quoted in Damsch-Wiehager 1997, 100). Writer Renate Damsch-Wiehager takes the idea of democratisation further, positioning it as key to Hoffmann's approach to the public environment.

In an essay titled "Picture-passages and the passer by—The picture, a forum for a public address, Reflections on the democratisation of the picture in, the work of Leni Hoffmann", Damsch-Wiehager (1997, 101) presents Hoffmann's practice as stemming from the question of how art might find its way into everyday life, where it can be "discussed ... [by] people from all social strata." To this question Damsch-Wiehager (1997, 101) suggests that there "is one possibility: to involve the casual passer-by ... physically, and as a potential next step, conversationally." To illustrate how Hoffmann's work embodies the notion of the 'democratisation of the picture', Damsch-Wiehager refers to a particular intervention made by Hoffmann in Nuremberg in 1990. The intervention involved the application of plasticine onto the glass planes of a public show-case, which would be "visible to every passer-by" (Damsch-Wiehager 1997, 101). Damsch-Wiehager explains that Hoffmann "decidedly extends the intervention into everyday life providing monthly invitations, a freebee available at the cash counters of supermarkets and other stores which were avidly collected, read, taken along and possibly thrown away" (101). The use of distributed media to extend the intervention into everyday life is a methodology shared by both Hoffmann and Alÿs, and one that embodies these artists' desire to engage a public audience.

In his essay "Dispersion" writer and artist Seth Price discusses the history of distributed media as it relates to art practice and the avant-garde. Price describes the Conceptual art movement of the 1960s as distinguished by an attempt to fuse art and life, pursued in one way by artists through an appropriation of the printed page that saw an artist's work displayed in the pages of magazines and newspapers. What eventuated from these appropriations would be what Price (2008, 8) describes as the "shortcoming of classical conceptualism." Quoting writer Benjamin Buchloch, Price summarises this effect and suggests that "while it emphasised its universal availability and its potential collective accessibility ... it was, nevertheless, perceived as the most esoteric and elitist artistic mode" (Buchloch n.d, quoted in Price 2008, 8). Conceptual art's appropriation of the advertisement, article and page "were uses of mass media to deliver coded propositions to a specialist audience" (Price 2008, 8), and while despite being in the public, it seems as if these works were not *for* the public.

Price further explains, “whether assuming the form of ad or article, much of this work was primarily concerned with finding exhibition alternatives to the gallery wall” (8). The appropriation of various media and its dispersion to the public was in some instances more pragmatic than ideological, a way to covertly insert artistic content into everyday life under the nose of an unknowing public, or perhaps in spite of a general public. I recognise the methods of dissemination used by Alÿs and Hoffmann as representing a different intention, one that genuinely intends to engage a public audience as well as a contemporary art audience. The work *A Mural for The Newtown Jets* was made with the same intention, as a work made for a public audience, for a specific community as well as for an audience familiar with the history, aesthetics and ideology of Non-Objective art.<sup>40</sup> In the words of Alÿs, it is intended for the artwork to be accessible to a general public “without denying or diminishing the eventual contemporaneity of the content” (Alÿs 2000, quoted in Biesenbach and Starke 2010, 38).

Writing about what she describes as place-based art, Lippard makes a similar distinction between those works made in the public and those made for the public. She states that “the public in public art can be read two ways—passive or active—as private art in public spaces or as art intended to be understood and enjoyed (or even made) by ‘the public’” (Lippard 1997, 272). I identify the urban interventions of Hoffmann as reflecting the latter half of Lippard’s distinction, as works made in the public that are intended to be understood, enjoyed, and often made by the public.<sup>41</sup> Alternatively, Alÿs’ works are generally more aligned with Lippard’s description of ‘passive’, or private art made in public space—at least in their initial version. Alÿs’ actions are generally not made in consultation with the public, but instead emerge in public space without warning, where passers-by, pedestrians and bystanders are implicated as viewers. Often these works are only recognised as art once they are displayed in the context of the art museum

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40. In this regard I align my position with Lippard (1997, 286), who proposes that for place-based artworks, “the ideal should be an accessible core of meaning to which participants are attracted from all sides of art and life.”

41. As is the case with the Hoffmann’s work *Iluka* (2004) for example, analysed in Chapter One.



or gallery space, where they are seen by a contemporary art audience. What retrieves Alÿs' work from the category of 'private art made in public space', is the process of dissemination. Through the use of documentation Alÿs' works are distilled into images, videos, pictures, or statements that are used to disseminate the work to a public audience after the fact—after the intervention or durational action made in situ ceases to exist, the work is disseminated as *another* version. From here, the work may potentially take on the form of an urban myth or fable, as something that is discussed, debated, rumoured or gossiped about, prolonging the work's physical and temporal beginnings and potentially contributing to the regional folklore of a local public. It is this process that I identify as being aligned with the principles of situated practice, and that I will draw on in analysing the dissemination of some of my artworks to a local audience.

### **The fable**

The fable is a concept used by Alÿs to describe the affect of the disseminated artwork on a public audience. In discussing the relationship of his work to the notion of the fable, Alÿs explains,

If the script meets the expectations and addresses the anxieties of the society at this time and place, it may become a story that survives the event itself. At that moment, it has the potential to become a fable or urban myth. (Alÿs 2002, quoted in Biesenbach and Starke 2010, 36)

For Alÿs, an artwork disseminated to a public audience can potentially take on the form of a myth or fable that prolongs the work's physical form. I identify the fable and the process by which an artwork is absorbed into the community as a story, rumour or debate as an effective strategy for producing situated artworks. If an artwork becomes a story that is discussed amongst the members of a community, then it is surely oriented towards the conditions of that community and that locale—*it is situated*. As part of this project selected artworks have been in various ways disseminated to a local public as a means to investigate the potential for these works to take on the role of the fable.

The work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets* was documented with photography to create an image. This image was then used as part of a printed poster that included the location of the mural, and was displayed in two local pubs,<sup>42</sup> at the Jets home ground Henson Park, as well as on various community noticeboards around the Marrickville area (Figure 5.4). The image was also digitally uploaded to the Facebook page, website and Twitter account of the Newtown Jets (Figure 5.5). Whilst the posters worked to 'advertise' or inform the public as to the location of the mural, they also functioned to extend the Non-Objective artwork into everyday life (as artworks in their own right) through their insertion into what might typically be considered 'non-art spaces'; the pub, the library the noticeboard and so on. Uploading the work to various digital platforms allows the work to be shared, circulated, commented on and re-tweeted, from which the artwork can take on infinite meanings and readings, appropriated by various authors.

In his essay "The Image Object Post-Internet" writer and artist Artie Vierkant (2010) analyses the presentation of Post-Internet Art,<sup>43</sup> arguing that the re-editing and recontextualising of works by multiple authors results in artworks reflecting "a lack of representational fixity" (5) where any art object can be re-presented as another type of object entirely, without reference to the original (5). "For objects after the Internet there can be no 'original copy'" (Vierkant 2010, 5). In acknowledging these conditions that pervade the representation and dissemination of an artwork in the form of a digital image, Vierkant explains that a strategy employed by himself and others

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42. These pubs were The Henson and The Vic, which both sponsor the Newtown Jets.

43. Gene McHugh defines Post-Internet art as "art responding to [a condition] described as 'Post-Internet'—when the Internet is less a novelty and more a banality ...or when the photo of the art object is more widely dispersed [and] viewed than the object itself" (McHugh 2009–10, quoted in Vierkant 2010, 3). Vierkant further describes Post-Internet art as the "result of the contemporary moment" and provides a series of characteristics including "ubiquitous authorship, the development of attention as currency, the collapse of physical space in networked culture, and the infinite reproducibility and mutability of digital materials" (3).



**A MURAL FOR THE NEWTOWN JETS  
DAVID ATTWOOD 2013  
44 SHEPHERD STREET  
MARRICKVILLE**

Figure 5.4 David Attwood, *Poster*, 2013, poster, 29.7 x 42 cm.



Figure 5.5 Facebook page of the Newtown Jets, 2013, screen capture.

has been to create projects which move seamlessly from physical representation to Internet representation, either changing for each context, built with an intention of universality, or created with a deliberate irreverence for either venue of transmission. In any case, the representation through image, rigorously controlled and edited for ideal viewing angle and conditions, almost always becomes the central focus. It is a constellation of formal-aesthetic quotations, self-aware of its art context and built to be shared and cited. (10)

The dissemination of the artwork *A Mural for the Newtown Jets* in the form of an image to what exist essentially as two separate yet intersecting communities (the general public of the Marrickville area and the supporters of the Newtown Jets), reflects the strategies described by Vierkant; the image is at once self-aware of its context as art (and in particular its relationship to Non-Objective art), and at the same time is built to be shared and cited by a broad audience—an audience beyond the regular SNO gallery viewers and local art community. In being inserted into various social medias, the work intends to generate discussion, opinion and conversation, from which it may potentially take on the role of a Non-Objective Fable.

I posit that a Non-Objective Fable might take the form of an image or object that reflects the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art, and is simultaneously associated with or disseminated as a story, debate, memory or event. In regards to the photographic series made as part of this project *From across the city*, presented in Chapter Three, the way that the installed photographs were periodically removed (stolen?) from their display within the Queensgate car park and the subsequent imagined story or potential narrative that these photographs now hang in the living rooms of anonymous Fremantle locals could be thought of as a Non-Objective Fable. For Alÿs, the relationship between the artwork and the fable is an “interpretive practice” that is “performed by the audience, who must give the work its meaning and its social value” (Alÿs 2002, quoted in Biesenbach and Starke 2010, 36). It is thus the audience that may transform the artwork into a fable, and it is this process that the work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets* intends to engage.

After completing the work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets*, I had a conversation with a man who worked at the Aurora Biscuit Factory, who explained that the Marrickville area had a large Greek population and that there had been many comments made by locals about the mural's resemblance to the Greek flag. "Where's the cross?" the man asked jokingly, pointing toward the painting. I explained that I was aware of Marrickville's large Greek community but the similarities between the mural and the flag had not occurred to me. After explaining that the mural was in fact an abstraction of the Newtown Jets jersey, the man nodded understandingly and said that he liked it because he was "a Bulldogs fan."<sup>44</sup> Whilst it was not intended for the mural to reference the Greek flag or the Bulldogs playing strip, the mural was able to take on these meanings due to its position in the public domain and its subsequent circulation as social information. Below the image of the mural on the Newtown Jets Facebook page is a comment by a supporter reading: "Go home Mural your [sic] drunk I love it Long Live The Mighty Bluebags". The supporter's personification of the mural as being drunk is in reference to the waviness of the white stripes in the work's composition. It was intended for the waviness of these stripes to refer to the folds in fabric of the Jets jersey, and I had not foreseen that it might be an allusion to, or referent for intoxication. As evidenced by the likening of the mural to the Greek flag and the Canterbury Bulldogs, the work's position within the public domain affords the work a multiplicity of interpretations and readings, which are circulated amongst the community, and over time, may potentially become part of that community's collective memory.<sup>45</sup>

Shortly after pinning up the poster of the work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets* on the Marrickville Library community noticeboard I had a conversation with a woman about my use of the term 'mural.' She asked me to show her where the mural was on the poster, to which I pointed to the field of blue intersected by

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44. The Canterbury-Bankstown District Rugby League Football Club (The Bulldogs), like the Newtown Jets, also wear a royal blue and white jersey.

45. In his essay "The Storyteller" writer Francesco Careri explains "many of Alÿs' actions have held the strength to go from mouth to mouth and become an oral tradition of the collective memory" (2010, 183). Lippard also suggests that "memory is part first-person, part collective" (1997, 34).

three white stripes. The woman refused to accept that the work was a mural, presumably because it had no figurative content. The woman was adamant that the term had been misused, and demanded the library have it removed. Whether or not my intention of making a work for the public of Marrickville was successful or achieved is difficult to measure and impossible to conclude. I began to question whether the public would take notice of the work, whether they would like the work and ultimately whether this was important.

In their book *New Works for Different Places* authors Tony Foster, Jonathan Harvey and James Lingwood analysed the after-effect of the temporary public artworks made as part of the *TSWA Four Cities Project*, which took place across the UK in 1990. The authors concluded that although physically temporary, the artworks nevertheless left a residue, a memory. "We are unable to gauge the usefulness or fertility of this residue. It is undeniably there however, a sedimentation from which other initiatives, new ideas, might emerge" (Foster, Harvey and Lingwood 1990, quoted in Doherty 2009, 195). I too am unable to gauge the efficacy of the dissemination of my work to the public of Marrickville. Nevertheless the possibilities that emerge from the work's 'residue'—its lingering on in the form of a faded poster on a notice board or wall of a pub, or as a circulated digital image—may include new initiatives, new ideas and new narratives born out of conversation, debate, stories and myth.

At the conclusion of his 2002 action *When Faith Moves Mountains*,<sup>46</sup> when the grandiose attempt to displace a sand dune was finished and the 500 volunteer shovelers had returned home, Alÿs said "we shall now leave the care of our story to oral tradition. Only in its repetition and transmission is the work actualized" (Alÿs 2004, quoted in Godfrey 2010, 15). In February of 2014, the work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets* was painted over, and the wall of the Aurora Biscuit factory

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46. Alÿs' work *When Faith Moves Mountains* was made in collaboration with Cuauhtemoc Medina and Rafael Ortega in Lima, Peru, in 2002. The action involved 500 volunteers who were each given a shovel and instructed to stand in single file along a sand dune. Each volunteer shifted a shovel full of sand by ten centimetres, effectively displacing the sand dune.



returned to its formerly blank state. As in Alÿs' displaced sand dune, perhaps my work will also be prolonged by the fable for years to come, by word of mouth and as a story of a mural on Shepherd Street that celebrated the Newtown Jets, way back when the inner-west was still a battling district, home to a battling club.

In the conclusion of his essay "Dispersion", Price's position on the efficacy of dissemination within the context of contemporary art practice is unclear. In his closing paragraphs Price suggests,

An art that attempts to tackle the expanded field, encompassing arenas other than the standard gallery and art world-circuit, sounds utopian at best and possibly naïve and undeveloped ... But hasn't the artistic impulse always been utopian, with all the hope and futility that implies?"

(2008, 17)

I concur with Price that an attempt to make work in and for the public is a utopian, perhaps even futile agenda, but nevertheless one of value. The attempt to produce Non-Objective artworks that are specific to a locale, issue, audience or situation is significant, regardless of whether such an attempt reaches the desired audience or has the desired effect. It is instead significant purely in its *attempt* to broaden the possibilities for contemporary Non-Objective art—to venture further afield.

The body of artwork produced as part of this practice-led research project will be presented as an installation of photographic images within an art gallery for examination. These photographs will perform a dual function; they will firstly work as the documentation of actions, interventions and observations made in various urban locales—in essence they will operate as records of situated Non-Objective artworks. At the same time, the photographs will be presented as artworks themselves and in their display within the art gallery will work to prolong what were temporary interventions, fleeting observations and durational actions made elsewhere. In line with both Hoffmann and Alÿs' methods of disseminating situated artworks to an audience in the form of images, videos and other forms, I have used photography as a way to distil situated artworks into images and present them for gallery exhibition.



In the above section of writing I focus specifically on methods of disseminating artwork to a public audience beyond conventional art institutional settings. In conjunction with these methods of dissemination, both Hoffmann and Alÿs frequently exhibit the documentation of situated artworks within art gallery contexts. In these cases, the gallery becomes a situation that the artist responds to, where the gallery's physical, historical, social, and political conditions are engaged with, responded to and taken into consideration, with the documentation of situated artworks presented accordingly. For example in Alÿs' work *Beggars*, an ongoing project begun in 2001, photographs of people begging at subway stations are consistently framed from above, with the photographer looking down on the subject. Alÿs presents this photographic series as a digital projection screened onto the gallery floor, creating a "top-down view [that] is implicitly hierarchical, much like that of the passers-by who look down as they descend into the underground" (Alÿs and Medina 2010, 125). Alÿs and Medina explain that the projection of the work onto the gallery floor provides a "shame-faced glance at poverty, translating into the gallery situation a fragile encounter between the beggar and the observer" (125). In this way the conditions of the gallery space and the relationship of the viewer to the artwork are used to elucidate the conceptual framework that underpins *Beggars*. As part of this practice-led research project I will employ this approach to the presentation of my body of artwork within the gallery for examination.

In this chapter I have presented a body of work made in response to the locale of the SNO gallery space. Using the playing strip of the rugby league club the Newtown Jets as an agent, this body of work is informed by the conditions of locale and attempts to engage a regional folklore through the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art. From this body of work emerged particular concepts deemed significant to the notion of a situated Non-Objective practice, such as the readymade situated Non-Objective artwork (*Henson Park*) and the Non-Objective Mural (*A Mural for the Newtown Jets*). These artworks evidence a dialectical relationship between the formal and the social, autonomy and contextual reference, the Non-Objective and the situated.

The dissemination of artwork to a public audience was presented and analysed as a strategy for producing situated artworks. Through an analysis of the practices of

artists Hoffmann and Alÿs I established that an artwork disseminated amongst a public audience, in the form of an image, video, painting or flyer may take on the role of the fable, outlasting or prolonging the work's initial physical version and potentially contribute to the collective memory of a community. The application of this strategy within this project took the form of a photograph taken of the work *A Mural for the Newtown Jets*, which was used to create a poster as well as a digital image uploaded to various social media platforms. I have hypothesised that the disseminated work may take on the form of a Non-Objective Fable, and despite the difficulty of measuring or recording this process, the intentions of the attempt marks a contribution to the potential for a situated Non-Objective practice.



## Conclusion

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To conclude, I will first briefly outline the lines of inquiry that have been fundamental to this project before summarising the project's significant findings. In this project I have attempted to synthesise seemingly oppositional modes of creative art practice through practice-led research. Non-Objective practice and situated practice and the differing aesthetic and ideological principles that define these modes of creative endeavour have been at the centre of this project.

An analysis of the emergence of Non-Objective art in Australia and the conventions that pervade contemporary local Non-Objective art has revealed that Non-Objective practices generally adhere to notions of modernist autonomy and formalism in the production of artworks for gallery display. I have argued that the social, political and historical conditions of the public domain beyond the confines of the art gallery are yet to enter the frame of reference for the majority of contemporary local Non-Objective practices, and as such a gap in knowledge endures between this discourse and the discourse of situated practice. Using my creative practice and the conflicting impulses that have recently begun to inform this practice as a starting point, this project has provided a response to the identified gap in knowledge, and has examined the potential for a situated Non-Objective art practice.

A fundamental paradox has been pivotal to this project; how can Non-Objective art practice engage with or be inclusive of the social, political, physical and historical conditions of the public domain when it is principally defined by the preclusion of such content? Questions of the ways that artworks made in the public domain can be both Non-Objective and situated have been addressed using a methodology of dialectics. Employing dialectics as an analytical tool has facilitated the production of artworks that present new syntheses, or what I have described as situated Non-Objective artworks.

Using the stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art in conjunction with the methods of situated practice, the artworks produced as part of this project have taken various forms, including actions performed in urban locations, interventions made in the public domain using found objects, the documentation of urban phenomena



Figure 6.1 David Attwood, *Pissing on the Peril (yellow on yellow)*, 2014, photographic documentation of an action.

and what I have described as the Non-Objective mural. In the work *Henson Park*, I suggest that the painted wooden seats of Marrickville's Henson Park might be considered, understood and appreciated as a readymade situated Non-Objective artwork. This artwork proposes that Non-Objective artworks might be discovered, illuminated and excavated from within the public urban environment as readymade situated events, expanding understandings of Non-Objective practice beyond the production of autonomous artworks for gallery display. Through the production of a body of artwork, I have investigated the potential for Non-Objective practice to engage notions of the physical, the historical, the sociopolitical and regional folklore as these conditions relate to locale and the public domain. It is my intention for the artworks made as part of this research project to work as reflections on the notion of a situated Non-Objective practice.

Prior to undertaking this project I had begun to identify a rift in my creative practice. I had become increasingly interested in the creative potential of the public domain, and found this interest difficult to reconcile within the Non-Objective practice I had built. This project has allowed me to reconcile this rift, and to effectively erode the distinctions between Non-Objective practice and situated practice to produce artworks that make use of both. Humour and irreverence have begun to emerge as qualities in my work, which has proven to be an exciting new frontier for a practice previously bound by an austere formalism and stringent self-referentiality. A 2014 work titled *Pissing on the Peril (yellow on yellow)* is one such example that humorously reflects on the history of abstract practices in Australia and their public reception. Whilst a field of bright yellow dominates the image, the local political history synonymous with Ron Robertson-Swann's public sculpture *Vault* of 1981 (colloquially known as the 'Yellow Peril') elicits reading beyond the formal (Figure 6.1).

This project has seen social, political, historical and personal interests enter the frame of reference for a previously exclusively Non-Objective practice. The conventions, tropes and stylistic vocabulary of Non-Objective art have through this project become a set of tools that in my practice I am now able to draw on when appropriate. The aesthetics and ideology of Non-Objective art no longer provide the parameters for my creative practice, but are used in conjunction with other impulses to enrich it.

To extrapolate from the outcomes of this project and to hypothesise about the implications of its findings for the broader community of art practice, perhaps this project will act as a catalyst for expansion. The notion of a situated Non-Objective practice may expand the field of possibilities for the discourse of Non-Objective art in Australia beyond the production of autonomous artworks for gallery display, to a more broad engagement with the sociopolitical, physical and historical conditions of the public domain. Within this exegesis I have described what I consider to be the conditions of local Non-Objective art's state of hermeticism, operating on the fringe of contemporary Australian art within its own system of self-validation. I propose that a situated Non Objective practice may direct attention towards the local situation, to what is specific to locale, and may provide new innovative ways to examine, explore and contribute to contemporary Australian identity, culture and art.

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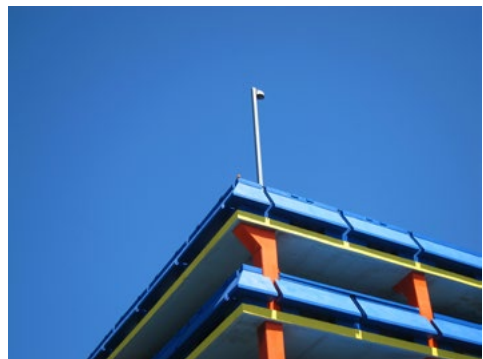


## Appendix

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This Appendix is a collation of additional practice-led research that is not featured within the main body of the exegesis. Comprised of exploratory studies, initial attempts and unresolved works made between 2012 and 2014, this research contributed to the production of the final body of artwork presented as part of this project. I present these outcomes here as a way to further elucidate the methods and processes that have informed my practice-led research.

All photographs are by the author, unless otherwise stated.



Early attempts to extend various AC4CA wall paintings through the use of an orange.  
Fremantle 2012.



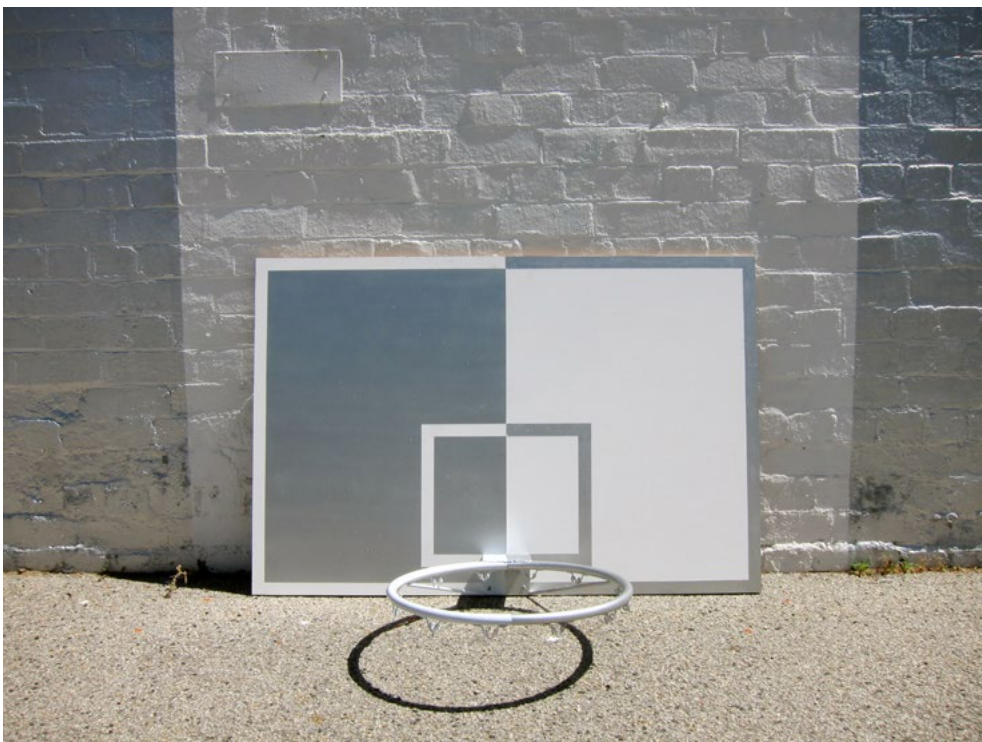
Above: Photograph taken using the reflection from the bonnet of a parked car.  
Fremantle 2013.

Below: Documentation of graffiti—the breakdown of autonomy through assimilation.  
Fremantle 2012.



Installation view of *Black and White Henry St*, Fremantle 2012.





An attempt to extend the AC4CA wall painting through the installation of a basketball hoop. I had intended for the intervention to potentially transform the locale of the wall painting—a private car park into a public space. Fremantle 2012.



Installation view of *From across the city*, Queensgate car park, Fremantle 2013.



Early interventions using the pink fishing rod. Victoria Quay, Fremantle 2013.





Early interventions using the pink fishing rod. Victoria Quay, Fremantle 2013.

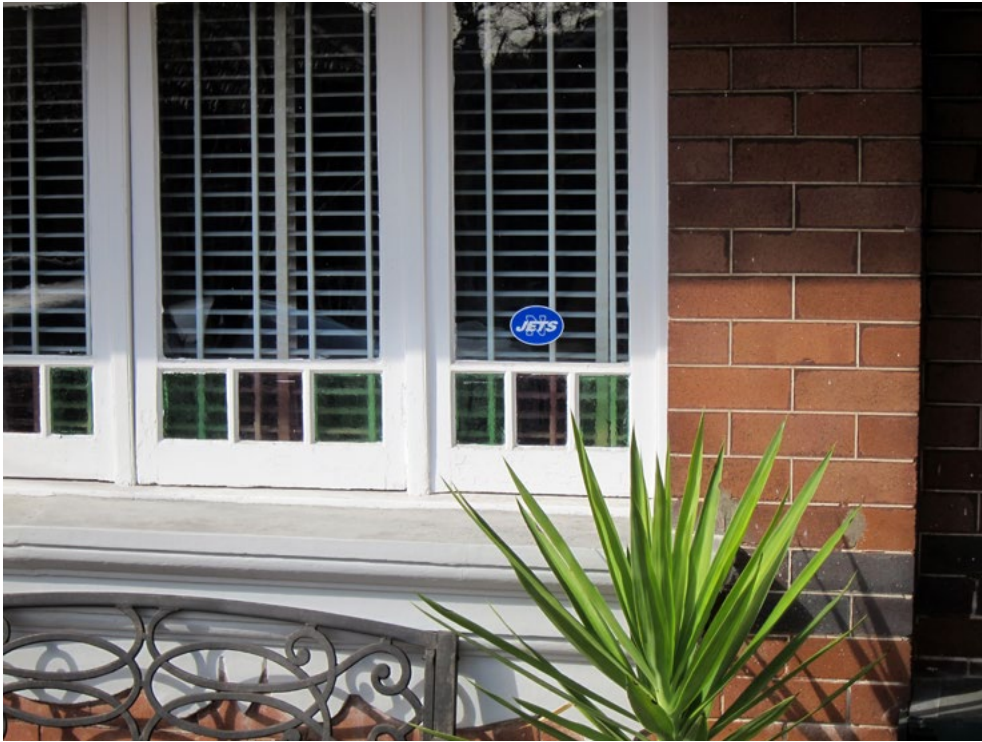




Trial for the performed action *Fishing*. Victoria Quay, Fremantle 2013.  
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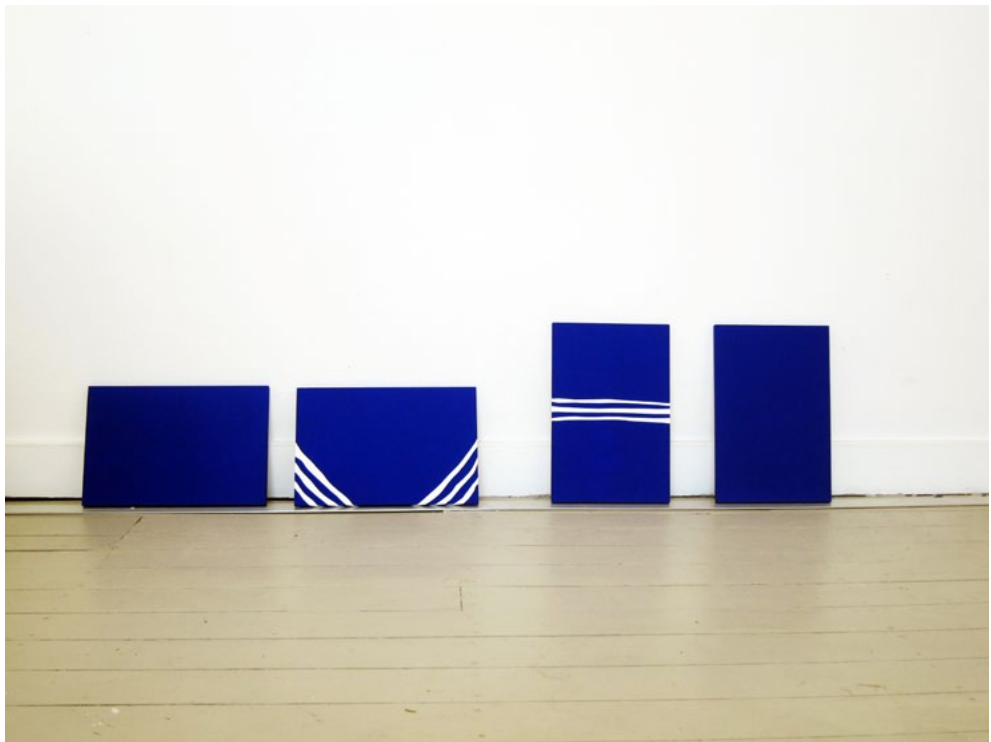


Documentation of Henson Park. Marrickville 2013.

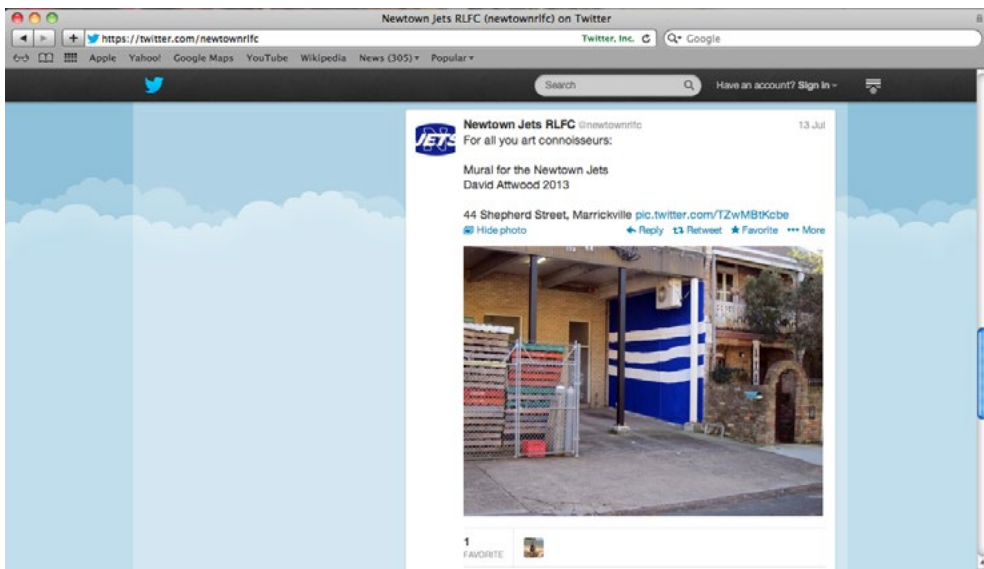


Documentation of Newtown Jets paraphernalia. Marrickville 2013.





Studies for *A Mural for the Newtown Jets*. Marrickville 2013.



Above: Installation of poster at The Henson. Marrickville 2013.

Below: Photograph of *A Mural for the Newton Jets* on Newtown Jets Twitter page. 2013.



Installation of *A Mural for the Newtown Jets*. Marrickville 2013.



Installation of a Non-Objective Newton Jets supporter's banner, seen from the gallery window of Sydney Non Objective. Marrickville 2013.





Documentation of blue objects found throughout the suburbs of Sydney's inner-west. I had intended for the documentation to implicate the objects as Newtown Jets supporters merchandise. The items would also be objectified, comprising a constellation of situated blue forms. Inner-west Sydney, 2013.





Performed action using Non-Objective Newtown Jets supporter's banner. Henson Park, Marrickville 2013. Photograph by Shannon Lyons.